

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

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JUMP CUT

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Kinesthesia in martial arts films Action in motion

by Aaron Anderson

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Seeing *Enter the Dragon* in basic training inspired army recruits to do well on their physical training test.



An aikido match: Bodily memory is built up through practice and expresses itself in action.

On the night before my basic training's final physical training test, the senior drill instructor, Sergeant Vasques, ordered the entire company out into the hallway. In the middle of the hallway he had placed a television monitor and a VCR, and he ordered us all to sit in front of it. "You know how after you watch a kung fu movie, you feel like you're a bad motherfucker?" he said. "You go outside and kick trash cans and maybe you fight with your friends, because you feel like nothing can stop you, like you're Bruce Lee? Well, tonight you're all going to watch Bruce Lee. And tomorrow you're all going to pass that test, because you're going to be Bruce Lee."

Then he turned on the VCR and we watched Bruce Lee perform impossible feats of martial arts prowess in *Enter the Dragon*. After the film, we were so intoxicated with our newly found sense of invincibility and anticipation of the test to come that we stayed up all night long "kungfu-ing" each other. This happened in 1986. Although I can no longer remember whether we all managed to pass the test the next day or not, I can still remember the physical rush of empowerment that prompted us all to stay up fighting in the hallway after the film. In fact, the physical aspects of that night — the physical virtuosity of Lee, our own kung-fu fights, and the intensity of the following PT test — remain among my most vivid memories of basic training.

I think that to some extent the vicarious association we achieved through watching Bruce Lee that evening did not happen just mentally. Our mental association with the invincible character we saw on screen expressed itself through our own physical actions as we consciously attempted to recreate elements of Lee's movement within our own bodies. This physical recreation of movement, in turn, constituted a

type of muscular memory.

In this essay, I wish to address the degree to which this type of muscular memory plays a role in communicating aesthetic concepts. That is, bodily memory itself allows a certain type of communication to take place, and this communication itself may involve aesthetic concepts inexpressible through other medium.

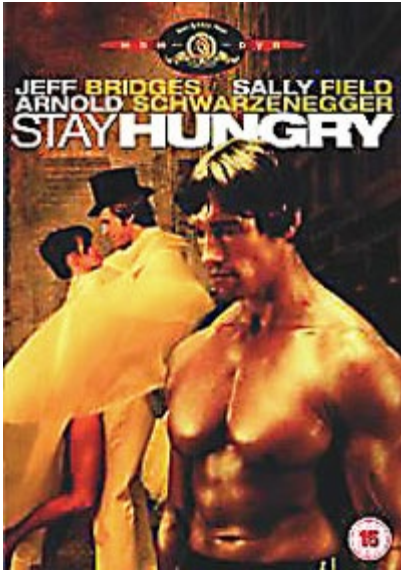
Paul Connerton describes bodily re-creations similar to those my fellow soldiers and I performed as "bodily practice" (72). He offers the supposition that bodily memory itself becomes expressed through some type of "action" or "practice" — that is, by doing something. This doing inherently involves some type of bodily motion. And such motion is central to my discussion of the action film. However, before talking about action cinema proper, let me clarify several obscuring notions in film studies about the action genre.

Present scholarship on the action film usually understates bodily movement's effect on audience response. In fact, even essays about the action film that do not directly address questions of the action sequences' physicality still tend to use language which dismisses the movement inherent in those sequences. For instance, when Justin Wyatt discusses the primacy of marketing for "high concept" films (of which action films form a sub-group), he writes,

"... high concept can be identified through the surface appearance of the films: a high tech visual style and production design which are self-conscious to the extent that the physical perfection of the film's visuals sometimes 'freezes' the narrative in its tracks." (25)

In contrast, by describing the primacy of movement in several action sequences that occur in high concept films, I reconsider to what extent these action sequences actually "freeze" the narrative, or to what extent the narrative itself is primarily focused on them.

Essays that addresses the actor's or star's body and physique likewise tends to understate bodily motion's effects on audience response. Instead, scholarship in this area has focused more on issues pertaining to a passive body-on-display. In this vein, action heroes often are described in terms of their musculature. Audience pleasure in watching action heroes is then described in terms of muscular display, of beautiful bodies displayed and gazed upon. Thus Yvonne Tasker describes action cinema as "muscular cinema" and coins the term "musculinity" to describe "a physical definition of masculinity in terms of a developed musculature ... not



If critics emphasize the star's body and physique, they may underestimate bodily motion's effect on audience response. Arnold Schwarzenegger began as a body builder, his role in his first film *Stay Hungry*. He went on to play action heroes, but he has never been known for his martial arts skills in the way that Steven Seagal and Jackie Chan have.



The term "movement" implies continuous spatial and temporal flow. Martial arts practitioners wear loose fitting clothing that

does not emphasize body and physique, as seen here in the practice of hapkido.



The sergeant in basic training did not want us to look like Bruce Lee but to act like him, to feel we could perform like his character and emulate the unstoppable nature of the action we saw.



Jackie Chan is known not for his muscularity but for his martial arts skill and his daring as a stunt man. Here, in *Rumble in the Bronx*, the thrill comes from seeing him fly through the air.

limited to the male body" (3). She describes muscular action heroes as "pin-ups," defined in part by "an insistent imagery which stresses hardness" (Tasker 77). For her, the action in action films (or muscular cinema) remains secondary to the display of muscular bodies:

"...any display of the male body needs to be compensated for by the suggestion of action. Thus sports pin-ups and the portrayal of the feats of near-naked action heroes both offer the body as to-be-looked-at whilst refusing the 'femininity' implied by that quite passive position." (Tasker 77, citing Richard Dyer)

Problematically, to focus on the action hero's muscular nature denies the primacy of motion inherent in the genre's "action" nature. While an action hero or heroine's muscularity often contributes much to the pleasure of watching an action film, I argue that in martial arts films the muscularity of an action hero's body plays a secondary role to the very fact of bodies in motion. Surely high concept action film stars do consciously display their muscular physique for viewing pleasure. But the critical language used to analyze action films often remains too static in nature. The critic may describe frozen moments or single images from a moving sequence. But without an adequate description of movement, scholarship in the area often cannot adequately describe much of the action it seeks to address.

Movement vs. muscularity

At this point, I want to establish a clear distinction between muscularity and movement. Muscles constitute part of human beings' physical makeup. Muscularity indicates the degree to which people develop these muscles and display them as developed. Muscles are the engines that allow the human body to move. However, in film criticism, movement itself does not inform the concept of muscularity. Discussions of actors' human muscularity tend to delineate a static, "pin-up" style of display that is frozen in time and space. The very definition of muscularity thus limits the critical presentation of movement to a series of static frames. Indeed, those frames can be described in terms of muscularity. However, such writing necessarily underrates or omits altogether analyzing musculature's potential for movement.

Film movement consists of more than a series of static, frozen frames displayed one after another. Movement implies a continuity between frames. This continuity is more than a sequence of static moments; instead, the term "movement" itself implies continuous spatial and temporal flow. This is a



A fight scene from *Rumble in the Bronx* ...



... shows how Jackie Chan's fight choreography is highly stylized and...



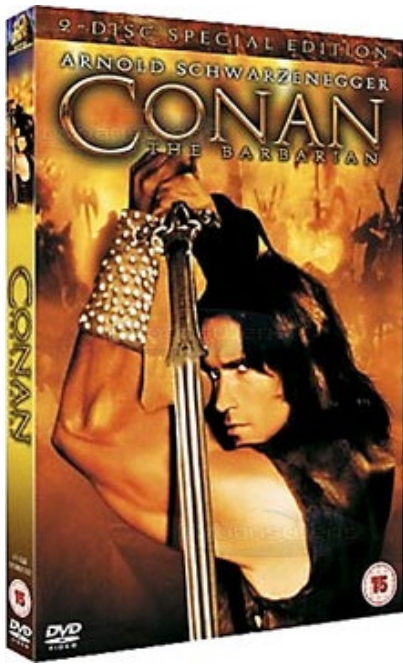
... how the characters in Chan's films rarely seem injured as a result of the fight. Such scenes have a fantastical element and often incorporate 20 to 30 fight moves.

way of conceptualizing movement that stands as inherently incompatible with descriptions of frozen moments. For this reason, any critical discussion of actors' movement must develop a whole other argument separate from considering muscularity. For example, many dancers have lithe, muscular bodies pleasing to view; however, the dancer's movement makes him or her a dancer, not muscularity. In constitutive terms, muscles support and create movement, but they do not constitute the movement itself.

To be sure, dancers and martial arts stars do display their muscularity. Bruce Lee, for instance, has often been depicted in various states of undress, flexing his well-conditioned musculature. This does not imply, however, that the primary aesthetic in Bruce Lee's films entails a passive display of this physique in "pin-up" form. Sergeant Vasques did not show *Enter the Dragon* to encourage us to emulate Bruce Lee's body; rather he wanted us to emulate the actions of the invincible martial artist we saw on screen. That is, we were not encouraged to look like Bruce Lee, nor meant to feel that we should look like Bruce Lee's character, nor encouraged to focus our attention on Bruce Lee's body. Rather the sergeant encouraged us to act like Bruce Lee or to feel as if we could perform like Bruce Lee's character. In short, he wanted us to emulate the unstoppable nature of the action we saw. That evening in basic training primarily focused on the degree to which we could physically appreciate Bruce Lee's apparent willpower and virtuosity of movement. The sergeant hoped that we could re-create some aspects of that power in the next day's test. Nevertheless, because Bruce Lee conspicuously displays his physique, any discussion of movement in Bruce Lee's martial arts films can easily become confused with issues of muscularity. For this reason, I have chosen to focus my discussion on other actors, particularly Steven Seagal and Jackie Chan.

I have chosen this focus for three reasons. First, Seagal and Chan have become famous action film stars not for how they look but for what they can do. Although both clearly keep in good shape, neither are "muscular" in the manner of bodybuilding action stars such as Jean Claude van Damme, Sylvester Stallone, or Arnold Schwarzenegger. Indeed, any adequate critical analysis of Seagal's or Chan's films could not just describe the actors' muscularity without addressing their skills as martial artists and/or stunt men. That is, the two actors' proficiency as martial artists and/or stunt men largely eclipses the degree to which they are or are not "muscular."

Second, the filmed fights of Seagal and Chan exist on opposite ends of what I call the "reality spectrum" of mimetic fights. Such a "reality spectrum" partly derives from the displayed



The climactic fight scene in Conan is created in the editing, by a collage of single unrelated attacks.

consequences of the fighters' movement. In a Jackie Chan fight, for instance, the characters rarely seem seriously injured as a result of the fight. In a Steven Seagal fight, on the other hand, the characters are almost always graphically shown as seriously injured, maimed, and even killed as a result of the fight. Seagal's fights, for the most part, are specifically staged and shot to look and feel like "real" fights. This shapes the films' marketing strategy. The audience knows that Seagal is a highly trained martial artist who claims to have been in many "real" fights. He is quoted as saying:

"... many, many different kinds of people came to discredit me, kick ass or kill me, and it never lasted more than a few seconds. And I'm not the one who got hurt or carried away." (Richman 306)

In the same fast-paced, decisive way, Seagal's films rarely incorporate more than three or four moves in any given fight sequence, and the filmed fights themselves are rapid and often have brutal conclusions.

In contrast, in a single fight sequence, Jackie Chan's filmed fights often incorporate up to twenty or even thirty individual movements. These fight sequences have been described as evolving directly from the highly stylized movements of Chinese Peking Opera (Cinema of Vengeance). Thus they represent the opposite — or stylized — end of the reality spectrum from Steven Seagal's filmed fights. (I leave it up to the reader to decide whether or not these opposite ends necessarily indicate something about the rest of the spectrum.)

In reference to genre studies of the action film, many critics often assume that fight sequences are constructed in the editing. And while this may pertain to some fights — especially those involving unskilled fighters — I argue that in martial arts films in particular, the editing serves not to construct movement talent where it does not exist, but rather to highlight the actor's movement talents as existing even beyond the editing.

My point is that elements of reality and stylization never remain entirely separate in mimetically representational fights. To prove this, I will describe elements of rhythmic stylization in Steven Seagal's fights, and elements of real danger in Jackie Chan's. In a subsequent JUMP CUT article, ["Violent Dances in Martial Arts Films,"](#) I will advance this analysis of kinesthetics and bodily memory by analyzing martial arts sequences from the films of Jackie Chan.

Certainly a director can create a fight sequence by editing together a series of otherwise unconnected attacks and

defenses. A good example of this occurs in the notoriously "muscular" film *Conan the Barbarian* (1981). The longest uncut attack sequence in this film consists of a three-move series in which Conan (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and Rexor clash their swords together three times on the high line. The climactic battle scene between the forces of Thulsa Doom (James Earl Jones) and Conan (Schwarzenegger) is created by editing a collage of unrelated single attacks. The effect reads very much like this: "attack"—cut—"attack"—cut—"close up on blood"—cut—"attack," and so on.

This combination of editing and swordfights has nothing to do with any true attacks or parries, but rather it simply consists of a series of sword-bashes incorporated into the final editing-created fight. Steven Seagal and Jackie Chan's fight sequences bear almost no resemblance to such a postproduction-created fight. Steven Seagal executes authentic attack and parry techniques from the martial arts forms Aikido and Escrima, which in their filmed form can extend up to ten attack-parry reprises between edited cuts. Likewise, Jackie Chan's films incorporate authentic techniques from a wide range of martial arts including Wing-Chun and Hapkido; the filmed version of such techniques may extend up to a staggering twenty or thirty attack-parry reprises between edited cuts. I argue that the execution of these prolonged fighting sequences is not created through postproduction editing. Instead, the editing itself serves to highlight the performers' movement virtuosity.

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Fight choreography and kinesthetics



In films like *The Legend of Zorro*, fight scenes tell a story, depict combat through codified movements, and draw on the social and historical meaning of what "swordplay" represents.



Japanese Kabuki plays use a highly stylized form of fight representation called *tachimawari*. Here fights are performed as a sort of

Because the static language of muscularity cannot adequately address concepts of movement, we need to find another form of discourse to describe these concepts. For such a purpose, stage and screen fight directors routinely use musical terminology to describe the rhythmic nature of many theatrical fights. Legendary fight director William Hobbs describes fight choreography in terms of "Fight Orchestration" (53). Likewise, fight director Dale Anthony Girard describes "The Sounds of Violence" (445), and fight director J. Allen Suddeth writes about "phrasing in fight choreography," as well as "patterns and tempo/rhythms," and "the music in the blades" (68-77). This sort of language describes choreographed martial movement in musical terms, which provides a useful alternative to static description.

Theatrical fights differ from "real" fights partly because they try to convey a story. A theatrical fight is designed to be "intelligible" to an audience. That is to say, a theatrical fight is specifically constructed so that an audience can clearly see and hear what is going on. A real fight's tactics, however, often result in the complete opposite — since an actual combatant would face a severe disadvantage if his opponent could see what was about to happen. Real fights often involve hiding an attack until the moment it is launched. Any "real" fighter wants a single attack or series of attacks to damage or disable an opponent before the defender can counter.

Clearly, a theatrical fight has a very different purpose from a real fight. In essence, theatrical fights represent real fights in a codified way. The theatrical fights are designed to convey a narrative story of conflict through representational movement. This means that any time a fight's primary purpose ceases to be about actually damaging an opponent and begins to entail presenting a movement-story to a viewing audience, a certain amount of stylization automatically is employed. One important aesthetic aspect of this stylization then becomes the musicality of the fight itself.

"The illusion of 'the real thing' is best achieved when not only what the audience sees but what it hears and feels carries a ring of truth; when not

musical dance.



Practiced martial movement is different from unpracticed martial movement, insofar as the former implies a certain investment of time and training while the latter can simply result from one's reaction to desperate circumstances. Here, the practice of aikido, which often relies on joint locks.

Shot analysis of the fight choreography in Steven Seagal's *Out for Justice*



1. A combat sequence – which Seagal's character easily wins – opens the film, establishing martial skill as a central theme. Similar opening scenes are common to many action

only the look of the staged fight but the music of that fight – the held and released breaths, the running steps, the clang of metal, the voluntary and 'involuntary' vocal sounds, the lines and dialogue, the response to injury – combine to produce a vivid and believable impression. (Girard 445, citing Raphael)

The degree of stylization varies considerably depending on the medium or concept used. For instance, Japanese Kabuki plays use a highly stylized form of fight representation called *tachimawari* in which fights are performed as a sort of musical dance. Likewise, Chinese Beijing Opera combat involves a highly stylized display of acrobatics set to musical accompaniment. However, no matter how extreme the form, some degree of stylization and musicality always function in choreographed fights; and these fights themselves act as a sort of movement-narrative. This kind of narrative can convey the story of the fight through movement alone.

Whenever stylization and musicality become expressed through a human body, a type of expressive movement is created that functions in many ways like dance. And from dance, we can get another concept particularly useful for describing the fight sequences in action films. A concept of kinesthetics (or kinaesthetics) exists principally in the realm of dance analysis and has become fundamental to any description of choreographed movement. It is a complex idea consisting of many different interwoven and related theories, including the interrelated topics of metakinesis and muscular sympathy.

Metakinesis, as the term implies, is the process of transferring something through the medium of movement. A forerunner in this area of movement analysis, John Martin, describes metakinesis this way:

"Movement, then, in and of itself is a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the unconscious of one individual to that of another. This should not be as strange an idea as it seems to be. Back as far as Plato, and perhaps farther, it has been toyed with by the metaphysical philosophers. Kinesis is the name they gave to physical movement; we find that there is correlated with kinesis a supposed psychic accompaniment called metakinesis, this correlation growing from the theory that the physical and the psychical are merely two aspects of a single underlying reality. We are not here concerned with theories of metaphysics, and it

films.



2. An early action sequence again shows Seagal's character, Gino, easily outmatching opponents. Here Seagal uses a wrist lock to disarm a man who had been pointing a gun at him. As guns are visual markers of power, the ease of the disarm marks Gino as especially dominant.



3. Special effects – here a meat cleaver embedded in a prosthetic hand – allow a kinesthetic revulsion for abnormality. Intellectual knowledge that the effect isn't "real" tempers viewers' physical response.

makes very little difference what we may choose to believe about the relation in general between the physical and the psychical. It is extremely important, however, that we see in the dance the relation that exists between physical movement and mental – or psychical, if you will – intention." (13-14)

Although this passage primarily addresses issues related to modern dance, Martin's definition of metakinesis can also describe elements of choreographed martial movement. Martial movements intended to be seen necessarily have an expressive design. The movement itself aims to convey a story or narrative. For example, a simple movement-narrative might enact something like, "Good guy throws a punch and hits bad guy in the nose." If I describe such a simple action in terms of movement-narrative, at first glance my strategy may seem too obvious or overly analytical. But the basis premise this example serves to demonstrate is crucial — that movement itself can be the medium through which a martial narrative is transferred. And this kind of analysis serves as an important basis for understanding other aspects of metakinesis in relation to martial movement. A key critical question then becomes this: If movement itself can act as the medium for transferring narration, what else can movement transfer? Martin's definition of metakinesis also implies transferring "aesthetic and emotional concept[s]." What, then, do these concepts comprise?

One of these concepts related to martial movement entails a romanticized empowerment relative to a displayed level of skill and training. Practiced martial movement is different from unpracticed martial movement, insofar as the former implies a certain investment of time and training while the latter can simply result from one's reaction to desperate circumstances. Practiced martial movement can, in fact, deserve the label "martial art." Here, the term "art" in reference to movement qualifies the movement as specifically skilled or practiced. The time and training of practiced martial movement, in turn, implies a certain level of readiness for physical confrontation and thus results in the fighter's empowerment through increased movement potential.

Such physical empowerment also includes certain romantic aspects anchored in the past. Paul Connerton describes practiced movement as a form of "memory":

"Many forms of habitual skilled remembering illustrate a keeping of the past in mind that, without ever adverting to its historical origin, nevertheless reenacts the past in our present



conduct. In habitual memory the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body." (72)

4. Aikido practitioners use joint locks to control opponents. Here an arm bar creates a kinesthetic impact in the viewer that is different from the impact created by the special effects meat-cleaver-through-hand seen in the background. Both images involve pain and both create a certain cinema of attractions, yet each has a movement that "feels" different.

The practice of martial arts, in fact, seeks in part to make martial movement instantaneous and reaction habitual. Practicing martial arts has as one of its goals supplanting conscious thought with physical reaction. This "habitual skilled remembering," in Connerton's terms, then "reenacts" aspects of the movement's "historical origin." That is, certain types of movement (or "bodily practice" to use Connerton's terms [72]) may evoke romantic or idealized aspects of the historical origin of movement forms.

Take, for example, staged swordplay — in theater, in child's play, or on screen. Swinging a sword might evoke images of knights on horseback or mythical heroes slaying dragons. Specific images of knights or heroes do not necessarily get evoked through the movement of swinging a sword, but the potential to invoke aspects of these images always exists within the movement itself. In other words, movement has the potential to reenact elements related to the historical origin of the movement itself. Since memory is "sedimented in the body," bodily movement can evoke memories of that movement's historic origins. The act of swinging a sword thus has the potential to invoke images from the history of swordplay. And since swordplay itself has become widely romanticized in history through art and literature as well as through the more general cultural and psychological practice of idealizing the past, romanticized images of this past have the potential to accompany this "reenactment."



5. A prolonged bar fight provides the film's main action sequence. The choreography is neatly book-ended by showing the same man shoved into the same phone booth. This creates a structured way for audience members to "read" the fight within the film's overall narrative.

Likewise, Asian martial-arts movements may evoke images of Asia and, correspondingly, all the exoticism associated with those images. Romanticized aspects of movement are not necessarily invoked through this process of bodily sedimented memory, but surely a certain romanticism does accompany many people's perceptions of martial movement. This romanticism can take the form of an idealized longing for the past. Or we may see evidence of it in the longing for individual power through physical potential. Here, an idealized belief assumes that physical skill can solve a range of human conflicts. It is this type of simplified belief to which the term "romanticized empowerment" refers.

Whether one agrees with the specifics of this analysis or not, Martin's description of metakinesis when combined with Connerton's description of "habitual skilled remembering" implies that both viewed martial-arts movement and performed martial-arts movement have the ability to "reenact"



6. The bar fight's first sequence creates narrative tension largely through the use of syncopated sounds. Seagal/Gino randomly breaks glasses as he walks around the bar then shoves the bartender to the floor. The bartender's fall pulls down even more glasses. This in turn escalates the fight's building rhythm.



7. End of first sequence: Seagal/ Gino deliberately discards his pistol. This act constructs an atmosphere of heightened tension in which hand to hand combat becomes narratively inevitable.

elements of sedimented bodily memory. And certain movements, by referring back to their historic origin, can transfer elements of that origin to the fighters and to the viewers through the process of metakinesis.

Practiced art of martial movement has an elite nature, which also contributes to martial art's empowerment potential. Connerton describes the elite nature of certain practiced skills historically, principal of which was "the profession of arms" (85). In the West, prior to the sixteenth century, part of what granted men honor from bearing arms was the distinction of class that the arms themselves signified. Since only nobility could wear arms, the act of wearing arms demonstrated the wearer's noble birth. Later, however, as the bourgeoisie began to rise in wealth and power and also began wearing arms, the nobility distinguished themselves as a class by also displaying the time they spent practicing the weapons' use. That is, a man rich by birth could afford to perfect the art of swordplay, while a man rich through business would not have free time to develop such refinements. Displays of practiced movement thus served to indicate class distinction.

"Ceremonial avocations, no less than ceremonial privileges, display membership of an ancient group. These avocations represent an investment of time and skill in a particular type of symbolic capital: the objects endowed with the greatest symbolic power are those which display the quality inherent in the possessor by clearly demonstrating the quality required in their appropriation."
(Connerton 87)

Modern displays of practiced martial skill do not necessarily represent class distinction. However, martial arts films consistently privilege skill in physical confrontations over other class distinctions. In a martial arts film, what ultimately matters is how well a character fights. A character's social class or wealth does not matter, but rather simply how well the s/he performs in physical confrontations, from which viewers distinguish the characters' relative power. That is, in a martial-arts film, displays of practiced martial-arts movement, as opposed to displays of non-practiced martial movement, equal displays of "symbolic capital" through "investment of time and skill." Because the genre itself implies a visualizing of the concept of power, it is significant that the characters' relative empowerment can be discerned only through their movement. Ironically, both empowerment and negating class distinction are implied by practiced movement. Thus the process of metakinesis in martial arts films transfers a range of concepts in addition to narration. The genre always relies on aspects of practiced movement which are seldom



8. The overall bar-fight slowly builds as a single man attacks and is easily defeated. This man's attack was a single attempted punch, and Seagal/Gino's response was likewise a single, almost effortless, throw. This quick 1 – 2 rhythm establishes a choreographic foundation on which to build the multiple attacks that follow.

considered part of movement itself, but which are also not easily articulated except through movement.

Another aspect of kinesthetics, closely associated with metakinesis, is the concept of muscular sympathy. This refers to a physical, empathetic "feeling" evoked by the movement itself. With an arguable exception in certain cases of congenital paralysis, all human beings experience life in a human body that moves more or less like every other human body. Even if a human body becomes damaged in some way, it still shares basic structural similarities with every other human body. Every person who has a body thus knows what it "feels" like to move a human body through space. And every time a person sees another human body move, s/he implicitly understands what this movement might "feel" like. This feeling, itself, while expressed physically, includes emotional and psychological responses. An analysis of specific movement sequences in action films will help to clarify these terms in relation to choreographed martial movement.

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Out for Justice



9. Seagal/ Gino fashions a makeshift flail out of a cue ball and a bar towel. Improvisation like this shows his mental agility and tactical awareness. Likewise the cutaway shot explains to viewers how to "read" the movements that follow.



10. Tattoo confronts Seagal/ Gino. Note how the shot composition establishes tension between the lone anti-hero on one side of the frame against an entire group of opponents on the other. This, in turn, establishes an

Steven Seagal is known for his fighting skill, and the fight sequences in his films stand out for the sense of "realism" they portray. Seagal's characters use quick and brutal tactics (Figures 1, 2). Elbows are snapped with audible cracks in *Above the Law*, eyes gouged in graphic detail in *Marked for Death*, and bodies impaled with broken pool cues in *Hard to Kill* (Figure 3). These graphic (some may say brutal) effects comprise part of Seagal's trademark and reflect his star persona (Figure 4). In real life Seagal holds a sixth degree black belt in Aikido, and he claims to be "the first white person to operate a dojo in Osaka" (Richman 306). An article in *GQ* magazine describes this aspect of Seagal's star persona:

"Can this martial-arts master [Seagal] really do the things we have seen on film, the eyeball-gouging, back-snapping feats that have the young punks in the theaters turning to one another and squeamishly moaning 'Oh, shit?' Seagal, matter-of-factly, says, "Absolutely." Dan Inosanto, who apprenticed under Bruce Lee and now operates his own academy in L. A., says, "I've watched Steven instruct. I've felt his blocks. I've seen a lot of Aikido, and his is right up on top. He can make his work. It's for real." Seagal versus Lee? Seagal versus Norris? My money's on the big guy." (Richman 232)

As already mentioned, Seagal claims to have fought in real-life encounters with sudden, often violent conclusions. However, even though his filmed fighting sequences may appear "realistic," they are far from random or unstructured. To the contrary, they exhibit a choreographed aesthetic of form, rhythm and movement similar to dance sequences. Here I wish to offer an extended analysis of *Out for Justice's* barroom brawl sequence to illustrate this key concept for analyzing the dramatic use of movement in action films.

In this sequence in *Out for Justice*, Gino Feline (Seagal), a police officer, enters a bar seeking information about the whereabouts of a murderer named Richie Modono (William Forsythe). The brawl that results includes self-referential,

almost mathematical ratio of power – three to one – that the hero must overcome in order to win the fight. When he does (and we know he will), his character becomes marked as that much more “powerful” within the story.



11. Begin regular rhythmic sequence: Tattoo initiates the first group attack by stepping back and drawing his knife. Although prison knife fighting tactics (Tattoo claims to be from “Attica”) usually involve grappling and/ or striking an opponent from behind, Tattoo attacks in a manner reminiscent of a martial arts training drill. His attack is thus primarily choreographic rather than martial: the increased distance makes the movement easier to read.



choreographed, stylistically structured, rhythmic movement-sequences in the manner of dance. The first sequence begins when Seagal, as Gino, shoves one of the bar's patrons into a phone booth, at which point we hear the accenting sounds of a ringing phone bell and slamming booth door (Figure 5). Seagal then slowly walks across the bar and kicks the stool out from under another patron who tries to block his way. After briefly talking to Sammy (Gianni Russo), the unofficial leader of the gang inside the bar, Seagal slaps a man named Tattoo (Sonny Hurst) in the face. He then continues his slow stalk around the bar and shoves the bartender violently to the floor behind the bar; at this moment we hear the syncopated sound of breaking glass behind the bar (Figure 6). Seagal then breaks some more glasses and confronts the bartender again, taunting the bartender to fight. There is a brief, silent tension after which the bartender, a former boxer, attempts to throw a punch. Seagal immediately dodges the blow, blocks it and drops the bartender to the floor with a single, loud elbow strike to the face; once again we hear the syncopated sound of glass breaking behind the bar.

A brief silence follows, after which Seagal says, "I dunno, you know, I'm starting to get in a bad mood." Seagal threatens to roust everyone in the bar, telling them to "get up on the table." He then fires two rounds from a semi-automatic pistol in rapid succession into the ceiling — followed by the sound of brief screams and shuffling feet as the patrons of the bar scramble for cover. Sammy then loudly announces that the only "balls" Gino/Seagal has "is that badge and gun." In response, Seagal ejects the magazine from his pistol and clears the chambered round. He pulls his badge from under his shirt and announces to the entire bar: "Here's your trophy. Come and get it." (Figure 7) The sequence ends as Seagal walks slowly back out toward the middle of the bar, twirling a bar towel between his hands.

This first sequence serves several functions. It demonstrates Gino's blunt, outside-the-rules method of police work. And it provides a glimpse inside the character in whom we see a single-minded drive and purpose — a glimpse perhaps difficult to observe in any other way. Also, the seemingly effortless way in which Gino/Seagal dispatches both the man on the stool and the bartender displays both Gino's fighting ability and his use of direct, no-nonsense tactics. The relatively slow pace of the sequence — coupled with the syncopated rhythms punctuated with pauses — helps build a dramatic tension that did not exist before. And the repeated sounds of glass breaking and shuffling feet help to develop a shape and rhythm to the sequence as a whole — a shape and rhythm that will then be broken in later sequences for dramatic effect.

12. End of regular rhythmic sequence: the fight is choreographed to be easy to follow. Here “crack, kick” is immediately and rhythmically followed by “throw,” momentarily removing the combatant from the fight and allowing a rhythmic as well as a visual narrative pause.



13. “Sticks” is played by Daniel Inosanto, a world famous martial artist known for his skill at the martial art escrima (and for his friendship with Bruce Lee).



14. Seagal/ Gino blocks and attacks from the ground. Advanced Aikido practitioners take pride in being able to fight effectively while kneeling.

But perhaps this first sequence's primary function is to plausibly disarm Gino for the hand-to-hand combat. When Seagal, as Gino, puts down his pistol, a physical, hand-to-hand confrontation becomes, in effect, inevitable. The audience knows about Seagal's expertise at hand-to-hand combat. Even if members of the audience have not read about Seagal's personal claims to martial arts prowess, they have already witnessed Seagal's character, Gino, physically confront several other characters that set Gino up as a proficient fighter. Narratively, Gino's act of putting down the gun clearly functions to heighten the audience's anticipation of the physical combat to come.

Significantly, consciously to construct an atmosphere of heightened anticipation before a fight sequence runs counter to the notion that in an action film narrative, the fight sequences somehow “freeze” the narrative in its tracks. Since movement alone, in kinesthetic terms, can convey both emotions and idea, the action film narrative does not usually stop or slow down with the outbreak of physical violence. On the contrary, it can be argued that this anticipated display of martial arts prowess is in fact the main narrative focus. The screenplay and direction both concentrate on allowing just this sort of martial-movement display. Or to put it another way, this martial-movement sequence develops specific narrative and aesthetic elements valued here over other, more conventionally communicated concepts.

The second sequence in this barroom brawl demonstrates Seagal's famed talent to good effect. Once again, the action sequence employs kinesthetic elements and rhythmic musicality. This second sequence begins when one of the bar patrons attempts to attack Gino/Seagal from behind. Seagal sidesteps and blocks the attack, trapping the attacker's arm with the bar towel and throwing him over a railing in one swift, circular motion ([Figure 8](#)). Seagal then quietly slips a pool cue ball into a fold in the bar towel and spins the towel, in effect, fashioning a makeshift flail ([Figure 9](#)). Four men gather menacingly around him ([Figure 10](#)). Tattoo, the first of these men, pulls a knife and attempts to stab Seagal ([Figure 11](#)). Seagal immediately blocks the knife with his left hand and smashes Tattoo in the mouth with the cue-hall flail. A second man attempts an attack with one half of a pool-stick. Again, Seagal blocks the attack with his left hand and smashes the man on the head with the flail. A third man attempts an attack, but Seagal moves faster and smashes him across the face with the flail before he can strike. Seagal then kicks the man in the chest, sending him flying across a pool table. Another man attempts a running attack at Seagal's back, which Seagal simply catches, throwing the man over the pool table in one swift motion ([Figure 12](#)).



15. Here Seagal/ Gino uses a pool cue in the manner of a jo staff – one of the weapons traditionally associated with aikido training.



16. Sequence 3 (quiet syncopation): Single staff vs. double-sticks, aikido vs. escrima in a competition of movement skill. This phrase choreographically serves as a “feeling out” section that narratively allows the next phrase's fuller commitment.



17. The two phrases of this section are separated by a rhythmic break (both

Each of these blocks and attacks is accented with clear, audible sounds. With each attempted attack, we hear the “swish” of air and the “thud” of a block; and with each attack of Seagal's flail, a loud “crack,” as the pool-cue strikes like a drum on bone. These blocks and attacks have a regular rhythm — in direct contrast to the first sequence's syncopated sounds and pauses. Here, the sequence sets up a sort of musical rhythm (“block-crack, block-crack, crack-kick, throw”). This rhythmic sequence then ends the same way it begins. The first man, Tattoo (after spitting out his teeth) yells, “Mother-fucker, you knocked my teeth out!” and attempts an attack. Seagal blocks Tattoo's punch with his left hand and “cracks” him in the head with the flail in exactly the same rhythmic fashion as before.

Tattoo's two attacks thus serve to tie neatly together or bookend this rhythmic sequence, allowing the audience to more clearly understand the progressive narrative of the greater fight. The second sequence has much faster action than the first, and rhythmically more regular action. This pacing establishes a contrast between the two sequences, in effect creating a rhythmic tension between them, but it also serves to develop a sense of flow within the fight as a whole.

This sense of flow is further developed in the third sequence — which begins with the introduction of a martial artist name Sticks (Daniel Inosanto, [Figure 13](#)). As Sticks approaches, Gino/Seagal is struck with a pool cue on the back of the leg by the man he had earlier thrown over the railing, effectively dropping the protagonist to one knee. Seagal turns around and strikes the man in the head with the flail again, in the same manner as before ([Figure 14](#)). Sticks then approaches and begins to attack Seagal with a half pool cue in each hand. Sticks attacks here with a variation on the double-stick fighting style of Escrima — a Philippine martial art. Seagal, still on his knees, abandons his cue-ball flail and picks up a full-length pool cue which he then uses in the manner of a jo stick to fend off Sticks' attacks ([Figure 15](#)). Seagal and Sticks spar like this for several seconds. Their exchange is punctuated by the rapid sound of syncopated taps as each opponent attempts to find an opening in the other's defense ([Figure 16](#)). These “feeling-out” sounds then begin to build to a crescendo as Sticks closes in and delivers four hard, loud, evenly rhythmic attacks ([Figure 17](#)).

These attacks cumulate in a fifth blow which splits Seagal's pool-cue neatly in half and continue as each man confronts the other, double stick to double stick ([Figures 18, 19](#)). We hear the sound of loud syncopated taps (a rhythm which can be described as “quiet syncopation, 1-2-3-4-Break, loud syncopation”). This loud, syncopated “double stick versus

literally and figuratively). Sticks increases the pressure of his attack with four loud evenly rhythmic strikes, culminating in a fifth strike...



18. ...that breaks Seagal/ Gino's pool cue evenly in two. Auditory cues add to the movements' legibility (i.e. 1-2-3-4-break).



19. Double stick techniques require a high degree of coordination – clearly evident in the movement. Here, as before, the editing does not “create” the fight, but rather serves to highlight the actor's movement skill by displaying choreography within the shot.

double stick" phrase continues for a full fifteen seconds, longer than any other phrase in the entire fight series.

The tension within the ambient sound phrasing is further enhanced visually, with the use of several rapidly edited cuts in the film itself. The viewer's gaze rapidly shifts between views of Sticks, views of Seagal, and a series of wider views of the two of them in context ([Figures 20, 21, 22](#)). These cuts come progressively more rapidly until Seagal is struck in the hand and partially disarmed. Sticks then runs in to attack. Seagal avoids the attack and catches Sticks' right hand, lifting him to his toes with the application of a finger lock ([Figure 23](#)). We hear the Seagal film hallmark sound of breaking or separating bones. Gino then retrieves half his pool cue and dispatches Sticks with one swift, loud strike to the head in a way that recalls the second sequence.

The sequence has an unmistakable rhythmic quality. During the rapid editing, for instance, the audience cannot see all that is going on, yet the rhythmic sounds continue and build throughout. In these instances, the fight storyline is told primarily through the rhythmic ambient sounds of the combat. However, this rhythmic pattern derives from fight choreography as well as from editing.

To illustrate the choreographed structure of this fight sequence, I will note how different a structure it has than that of a fight sequence involving largely unskilled combatants, such as that seen near the end of *Conan the Barbarian*. In *Conan's* final battle scene, separate and largely unrelated attacks and parries are edited together in order to create the illusion of a longer fight sequence. In effect, the editing hides a lack of martial skill and creates a pattern that exists only in the final, edited version.

In *Out for Justice*, however, the combatants engage in much longer attack-parry combinations between edited cuts. These longer sequences have a rhythmic pattern unto themselves, and thus they display the actors' level of martial skill. The editing in *Out for Justice* does not hide a lack of martial skill; rather, it emphasizes a level of skill already attained by the actors. For example, in the "quiet syncopation" section leading into and including the "1-2-3-4-Break," the camera holds to a single view over Seagal's right shoulder, clearly showing the action. Both men feint and parry ten times in rapid succession before the edited cuts to show Seagal's pool cue break in two. The shots in the "loud syncopation" section, likewise, stay on each man long enough to display up to nine individual attacks, feints, or parries with the double sticks before the edited cuts to the next man. The martial use of double stick techniques requires a remarkably high level of coordination — clearly



20. The editing cuts back and forth rapidly between medium shots of Seagal/Gino and Inosanto/Sticks. These cuts add to the rhythm of the presentation, heightening tension and adding energy. But here the editing does not create the choreography.



21. One of the roles of editing in this fight – as in many martial arts fights – is to provide a clearer view of the hero's movements.



22. The loud syncopation of the next phrase conveys a narrative of increased effort and determination by both

evident in the movement itself. In this film, that trained skill can be seen and heard between and independent of any edited cuts.

The rapidly edited cuts themselves thus clearly do not hide a lack of movement ability, but rather the editing directs the viewer's attention to specific details within the fight and further heightens the tension of a very skillful exhibition. Although the editing does, of course, dictate the fight's final presentation, the skillful exhibition of movement principally establishes the fight's rhythmic pattern and tempo, not the editing itself. Editing can enhance the audience's understanding and kinesthetic appreciation of the fight, but here it does not "create" the fight.

After Sticks is dispatched, a fourth sequence develops which largely abandons rhythmic cadences for a more visually aesthetic display of bodies flying and tumbling through space. This sequence begins as one man runs in to attack Gino/Seagal from behind. Seagal, still on his knees, turns in time to catch the attacker's wrist, and with another turn of his body, Seagal throws the man back from whence he came — to the cracking sound of breaking or separating bones. The man's legs and feet spectacularly circle through the air in a high, graceful, yet painful-looking arc. A second man then rushes from the opposite direction and attempts to strike Seagal in the head with a beer bottle. Seagal once again catches the man's wrist and turns the man's body, throwing the attacker over his shoulder. And once again the man's legs and feet sweep in a high graceful arc through the air — again to the cracking sound of breaking or separating bones. A third man jumps up onto a pool table and attempts to kick Seagal in the head. Seagal stands and blocks the kick, momentarily trapping the attacker's leg. Seagal then punches the man directly in the groin and sweeps the man's other leg out from under him with a pool cue. As the attacker falls painfully to the table, his legs rise in a high arc directly over his head ([Figure 24](#)). This final attacker's end thus recalls both the graceful throws administered to the other two in this sequence as well as the emphatic ending beats of previous sequences.

The entire fight then concludes as it began: Seagal approaches the man he had earlier shoved in a phone booth and once again shoves that man inside — just as before and once again to the sound of a ringing phone bell and slamming booth door ([Figure 25](#)). This fight's structure, taken as a whole, is far from random. It has a clear beginning, middle and end, and it is set apart and neatly book-ended with the same man's being shoved inside the same booth to the same sounds. It displays a definite tempo and rhythmic patterns — characterized by a slow build to a climax, alternately

parties. Double-stick versus double-stick: Seagal/Gino fights Inosanto/Sticks in the style Inosanto is famous for.



23. This showpiece section ends when Sticks/Inosanto rushes in and is caught in a wrist-lock. In this film, aikido beats escrima in part because Sticks apparently forgot how to attack with both weapons at once. Here, as in many film fights, choreographic aesthetics trump martial logic.



24. The final sequence extends the choreographic language of the fight through the spectacle of bodies flying through space. Large movements of this type provide a certain "cinema of attractions" as well as allowing a more "open" or "expansive" feel

syncopated and regular rhythmic beats, and self-referential patterns that repeat within and between phrases. In addition, the editing is deployed not to hide a lack of movement skill, but rather to demonstrate the actors' high level of actual martial skill, especially the protagonist's.

The spectacular throws demonstrated in the last sequence characterize Aikido, the martial art for which Seagal is famous. Aikido techniques utilize a system of joint locks and circular throws. In addition being effective, these circular movements are inherently graceful and spectacular. Their use here functions to show Gino's unbeatable martial quality. But more importantly for the action film as a genre, the movement's spectacular, circular nature — the bodies' flying head over heels through the air — functions as a kinesthetic cinema of attractions.

Theories of kinesthetic response imply that the spectacular, gracefully arcing throws seen in the above brawl's last movement sequence will inevitably evoke in the viewer some form of physical, emotional sympathy or response. John Martin expresses this idea in the following way: Through kinesthetic sympathy the viewer responds to the dancer's impulse which has expressed itself through a series of movements. Movement, then, links the dancer's intention and viewer's perception of it.

"To a certain degree it is possible to say that no movement can be made by the human body which is not wholly non-representational. The body cannot conceivably be made to do anything, in other words, which the body cannot do. Even in the case of the acrobat and the contortionist we are made to feel, through muscular sympathy, the strain, the difficulty of the tricks performed, and hence to have a corresponding sense of courage, skill, superiority, or sometimes revulsion for abnormality." (12)

Since every human body intrinsically knows what it feels like to move a human body through space, movement itself evokes a "feeling" through a process of the viewer's muscular sympathy or empathy. The aesthetic appreciation of the movement does not occur entirely mentally. The body itself, through empathic physical sensation, participates in the process of understanding the viewed movement. Martin's description implies that this process extends beyond even what we normally consider "physical sensation" — implying that physical sensation includes elements normally considered "emotional," such as "revulsion," and also abstractions such as "courage," "skill," or "superiority." In addition, Connerton's

to the end of the fight.



25. Beginning and end: Seagal/Gino shoves the same man into the same phone booth to the accompaniment of the same sounds. Choreographic "buttons" of this sort "punctuate" the fight narrative by telling the audience when to stop "reading" the choreography.



26. Before confronting his main adversary one on one, Segal/Gino deliberately discards his pistol. As before, the film thus heightens the hand to hand combat to come.

earlier description of bodily-sedimented memory implies that these emotions and abstractions have something to do with individual, physical memory. In other words, physical empathy expresses itself through emotional response based on prior, personal experience.

In "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," Pierre Nora also describes "memory" in terms which place it not in the mind, but in the body itself:

"[T]rue memory ... has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories ... [Memory is] spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective..." (289)

In kinesthetic terms, this means that individuals may experience different aesthetic sensations to the same movement based on their own unique history. For instance, a person confined to a wheelchair may experience a different emotional response to watching another human body run than a fully able-bodied person watching the same movement might. Likewise, a person who has experienced joy on a high-dive platform may feel differently about watching a high-dive competition than might a person whose "memory" includes a great fear of heights. Through the process of physical memory, then, the process of kinesthetic sympathy occurs in specific ways based in part on individual differences in viewers' bodies and experiences.

We can analyze the last movement sequence in *Out for Justice* as kinesthetic spectacle. We might describe both a "revulsion" apparently felt by the "young punks in the theaters turning to one another and squeamishly moaning 'oh shit'" and also a vicarious thrill of power or superiority felt by the viewer. We would consider the possibility that "memory" has an individual, physical aspect expressed in part through "bodily practices" (in essence, movement). Such an understanding of the mechanisms of viewer response suggests that an audience's aesthetic understanding and appreciation of martial movement in the action film exist on several heuristic levels.

For example, some viewers are themselves skilled or aspiring martial artists. This is evidenced by the many martial arts film stars who grace the pages of the many "Insider Kung-Fu" or "Black Belt" style magazines. This segment of the viewing audience derives a certain level of enjoyment and understanding that draws on their own prior knowledge or aspirations. The kinesthetic effects produced in these viewers may include a sort of "insider" muscular sympathy. That is,



27. Richie (William Forsythe) is neither the model of muscularity nor a realistic challenge to Segal/Gino's martial skill.



28. Richie hits the wall. As in the final sequence of the bar fight, the spectacle of bodies flying through space creates a unique kinesthetic "feeling."



29. Kinesthetic responses are governed in part by personal experience. We physically understand the

any members of the audience who know what it feels like to throw someone through the air, or who have themselves been thrown through the air, will experience a more specific kinesthetic response relative to their own prior knowledge than will someone who does not have such prior muscular memories.

In addition to this insider level of appreciation, most viewers experience the more general kinesthetic reaction discussed above. Even if most viewers do not have prior muscular understanding of what it feels like to hit someone with such force or to be hit themselves, they will still experience a certain level of intrinsic understanding of the movement itself. This segment of the audience, even without prior muscular memory of the specific type of movement displayed, will still experience through "muscular sympathy" some "corresponding sense of courage, skill, superiority" or possibly just a "revulsion" for the "abnormality" displayed through the visibly broken limbs and the bodies flying through space. In other words, any given segment of the audience, although lacking insider muscular memory or prior knowledge of the martial arts, will still get enough information through the viewed movement to experience some type of kinesthetic response. Even though they may not have physical memories of specific movements, they may still physically understand the movement enough to turn to one other and "squeamishly moan, 'Oh shit.'"

Another level of kinesthetic appreciation comes from viewing things that can not normally be seen any other way. This is like the joy of watching a cinema of attractions. Enjoyment on this level comes from understanding, however tenuously or imaginatively, the "difficulty of the tricks performed." In this way, we feel a kinesthetic appreciation for the performer's virtuosity. Since "the body cannot conceivably be made to do anything ... that the body cannot do," any time we see someone do something that we ourselves do not believe we can do or that we have not ever thought of doing or are afraid to do, we may inevitably feel something — a sense of awe, perhaps, or a vicarious rush of muscular sympathy. The virtuosity of the movement itself evokes the viewer's kinesthetic response.

When audience response is analyzed in terms of these heuristic levels, *Out for Justice's* action sequences entail much more than "display of the male body." In fact, muscular bodies on display do not predominate anywhere in the entire film. Seagal is neither overtly muscular nor does he appear to "display" what muscular development he does possess. Throughout the long fight discussed above, he appears

images by degree, according to our own experience with the type of movement displayed. Although few viewers probably know what it feels like to be hurled into a closet, many people nevertheless physically understand the sensation of falling down.



30. Richie introduces a knife into the combat: a new obstacle for the hero to overcome.



31. Richie is hit in the head with the frying pan he himself had recently used as a weapon. The fight narrative shows the hero, Seagal/Gino, deliberately allowing himself to be tested in this manner. When he succeeds, the narrative both demonstrates his physical dominance and allows the establishment of a particular type of "justice"

dressed in long dark pants and a baggy long-sleeved shirt. Most of the bar patrons also wear baggy winter jackets or long sleeved shirts. Only two bar patrons wear what could be considered a variation on the standard muscle tee shirt; one of them is fat, overly tattooed and ugly, and the other is young and rather scrawny. Neither of them, in short, correspond to the model of muscularity even though they dress according to that model's prescription.

I would argue, therefore, that far from offering a "suggestion of action" in order to "compensate" for a display of a "passive" body, the movement sequences provide *Out for Justice's* main attraction. To discuss displays of muscularity in the films' action sequences is either irrelevant or at best secondary to the incidence of movement. I will explore this aspect of my argument in more detail by providing a close analysis of the film's last major fight sequence.

Near the end of *Out for Justice*, Gino/Seagal engages Richie in a final hand-to-hand fight sequence. At this point in the film, Seagal has either killed or incapacitated all of Richie's henchmen and has Richie cornered in a bathroom. Richie emerges from the bathroom and throws down his empty gun saying, "What are you gonna do? You gonna arrest me? I'm out of bullets!" Gino/Seagal still has bullets in his own pistol. Instead of arresting or simply shooting Richie, Gino ejects the clip from his pistol and removes the remaining chambered round ([Figure 26](#)). It is a movement reminiscent of the earlier bar room brawl. Gino says, "That's a shame because those bullets could have saved you a lot of pain."

Once again, the script clearly demonstrated the scene's narrative intent by having Seagal discard his pistol. It gestures that the fight sequence which ensues exists solely for the pleasure of watching Steven Seagal, as Gino, demonstrate his martial-arts prowess. The fight's outcome is never in doubt. The audience has already seen Gino/Seagal single-handedly destroy every other adversary — sometimes entire rooms full of them — and well knows that Richie stands no chance of winning. Seagal has, in fact, already won. He simply abandons one avenue of beating Richie for another, a hand-to-hand engagement. Richie himself is fat and slow and seems to display no martial arts skill at all ([Figure 27](#)). And yet the fight sequence lasts for a full two minutes — almost as long as the entire bar room brawl sequence and many times longer than any individual fight within the brawl.

This Richie-Gino fight sequence begins when Gino throws Richie across the length of an entire room and backward into a wall ([Figures 28, 29](#)). The rest of the fight progresses in a similar manner, in which Richie never succeeds in seriously

within the film's story.



32. Seagal/Gino is in complete control throughout this entire fight. Here Richie is about to be kneed in the face.



33. Richie is beaten so badly during this fight that he is often hit multiple times before he can even hit the ground. Richie never succeeds in martially challenging Seagal/Gino in any significant way.



injuring Gino/Seagal in any way even though he attempts to attack Seagal with his body, his fists, pieces of furniture, knives, frying pans, and finally a corkscrew ([Figures 30, 31](#)). Instead, Seagal takes each of the weapons Richie finds and beats Richie with them, throws him across tables and through windows, and hits him up to five times in rapid succession before Richie can even hit the ground ([Figures 32, 33, 34](#)).

In the end, after Richie dies with a corkscrew driven through his forehead, the audience essentially has gained no new narrative "information" or answers to plot enigmas ([Figure 35](#)). The audience knows that Richie is doomed before the fight begins. Any pleasure in the scene comes simply through watching the fight progress. The story of this fight is simple: the hero, Gino/Seagal, deliberately allows the villain, Richie, to test the hero in physical confrontation. In the course of this confrontation the hero overcomes a series of obstacles (body, fists, pieces of furniture, knives, frying pans, etc.) and reestablishes justice (of the "an eye for an eye" sort) on a level playing field (no gun) in a manner reminiscent of a medieval trial by combat in which God alone is judge.

Although neither Gino/Seagal nor Richie "display" their body for the audience to view, they act out an enormous amount of movement. This movement, in and of itself, creates a kinesthetic spectacle which communicates meaning and emotion to the audience. The movement itself conveys the narrative as well as any aesthetic concepts or emotions involved. The effect can be either pleasing or revolting depending on individual preferences and bodily memories, but the kinesthetic effect itself is the primary focus of the scene.

Conclusion

The theoretical description of spectatorship in this essay is not intended as general theory of film spectatorship or expected to have universal application. Rather I wish to introduce a heuristic device to allow a discussion of martial movement as movement in kinesthetic terms. Theories of bodily memory imply that the aesthetics of viewed human movement has some physical impact on the viewer's body — that movement aesthetics themselves are "felt" as well as "thought."

Conventional Western paradigms of "thought," however, largely exclude kinesthetic experience. Philosophers through the ages have wrestled with the juxtaposition of psyche and body without clear success. In contrast, all theories of kinesthetics imply that the Cartesian split represents a false dichotomy. Kinesthetic theories assert that certain mental or psychical elements have physical manifestations and that certain physical movements likewise have mental or psychical

34. Much of the fight choreography is almost deliberately redundant. Here a badly bloodied Richie is thrown through a window, only to be then dragged back into the room and beaten some more.



35. Final justice in this film is neither poetic nor pretty and Richie's death provides little narrative information. Instead, this moment – like the man being shoved into the phone booth earlier – functions as movement “punctuation,” telling the audience when the spectacle of the fight is over.

referents.

Clearly, Steven Seagal's film *Out for Justice* includes a spectacle of movement which cannot be analyzed in terms strictly limited to either muscularity or narrative plot function. In martial arts cinema, it seems that the spectacle of movement is itself paramount. To analyze films of this type, then, means to discuss and analyze movement. Fortunately, methods of dance analysis have been and are being developed which allow just this sort of analysis.

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Police shows on British television

New police blues

by Gareth Palmer

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"The fear of crime and the media's reassurance that something is being done constitute a closed world of threat and reinforcement which imprison the viewer. This truly signals the era of the postmodern spectacle." [1] [[open notes in new window](#)]

"As a public form documentary has the capacity to survive both post-modern scepticism and the constraints of the audio-visual market." [2]

In this paper I will discuss the new British police documentary series of the nineties best typified by POLICE: CAMERA: ACTION, CRIMEBEAT, and X-CARS. These programs all share the same characteristics in that they are 30-minutes long, are shown during primetime, and depend to a large extent on police footage and/or their cooperation. I see these programs as the logical result of a series of impulses which rightwing governments in Britain since the early 1990s have engineered in broadcasting. In terms of political effect, the shows focus on the crime spectacle to fix identity for a people who are seen to need guidance and instruction in the law's use and power. These programs are about constructing a new citizenship through fear.

I will begin with a discussion of this spectacle's genesis and explore how a climate emerged in which we can "enjoy" the fact of our being surveilled. I will then analyze the live-action crime shows to look at the ways in which they borrow from other television genres to construct and involve the citizen. The spectacle of a criminal's pursuit and capture, and the fixing of identity that takes place in that moment, bring to a head the crisis of representation faced by documentary. I will conclude by suggesting how this crisis might actually point the way to a new future for documentary.

Spectacle is a loaded term very much associated with Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard. But I am not pledging allegiance to these writers and their dystopian visions. I use the term *spectacle* because I want to investigate ambivalence. The tension and uncertainty experienced when watching performances of law and order speaks to documentary's crisis of meaning. In one sense these images belong to the simulacrum, the surface. They are flashy and exciting spectacles. But these police

programs also indicate the persistent signs of life from the public-service documentary tradition. These issues raised by the crime shows remain underdeveloped here but are important nevertheless, in defining the changing role of documentary in the public sphere.

Of all television's forms, documentary would seem most perfectly attuned to the archetypal public-sphere function of providing information for discussion and creating the space for informed and rational argument among the citizenry.

However, recent changes in television's economic and technological bases have underlined how trivialized and simplified the information now circulating in the public sphere has become. If documentaries offer us frameworks for interpreting the world, then to study how documentary forms change may aid our understanding of the genre's mutable place in the public sphere.

The conflict between documentary as mere spectacle and documentary as a force in constructing the public sphere cannot be resolved here. But the tensions between the two aspects of reality-based film and television play like a theme in the background, and they prevent me from asserting anything as old-fashioned and modernist about the genre as certainty.

CREATING THE CLIMATE

"It is in the emergence, too, of new institutions of knowledge that we must seek for the mechanism which could enable photography to function, in certain contexts, as a kind of proof..."[3]

The genesis of the crime show spectacle derives from surveillance and from the gaze which informs and inspires disciplinary technology. As Michel Foucault noted, in the shift in the episteme from the classical to the modern age, man emerges for the first time as the subject and object of knowledge.[4] Surveillance became woven into the new "social," disciplines of study, such as psychiatry, medicine and law, which have all sought to create recognizable individuals. Surveillance always accompanies looking for proof, for facts, for evidence. The look, such as the look institutionalized in photography, becomes enshrined in legal discourse and it finds its most obvious expression in the police. In this new age of files, then, disciplinary technology becomes used mainly to create individuals who can be stored, classified, noted and dismissed, or turned into useful and docile subjects.

The nation-state finds ample reasons to use disciplinary technology to control and monitor its subject populations. Foucault has used Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as a metaphor to describe the ways in which power diffuses itself throughout various aspects of our culture, from personal habits to architecture. As Foucault puts it, "Power in this new type of society, has drained deeply into the gestures, actions, discourses and practical knowledge of everyday lives."[5]

As a general social condition of our lives, we are being watched and, knowing this, we watch ourselves. The police are "out there" and "in here" too.

The state has uses for the knowledge this surveillance yields. The commercial sector's use of surveillance has gone hand-in-hand with the operations of state. The

first policemen were hired by rich merchants to guard their dockside properties at night. Commercial forces were the first to use surveillance such as CCTV (Closed Circuit Television). From the 18th century port to the modern shopping mall there is a direct connection. Commercial webs of surveillance overlay those operated by the state. Both very powerful sectors of society share a concern for the maintenance of law and order.

Those legally charged with the operation and maintenance of surveillance are the police.

"It was the police which installed the new power-nexus in the very heart of working class life, extending the emerging techniques of observation-domination beyond the walls of the new disciplinary and reformatory institutions such as prisons and penitentiaries."[6]

The British have learnt a relatively safe, comforting image of the police. DIXON OF DOCK GREEN, first broadcast in the 50s, remained for over twenty years a stable image of the caring but firm British bobby at the centre of community life. To gently counteract this idealized image were police drama series with a documentary feel such as Z-CARS in the 60s, THE SWEENEY in the 70s, and THE BILL in the 80s and 90s, all of which gave the police force a new realism, yet still stressed the abiding virtues of tolerance and sometimes grudging respect for the law. Paralleling these dramas was a documentary tradition which explored the often tedious reality of police work but which may have also served to humanize and complicate our understanding of the police. (The work of Roger Graef stands as the best example of this). However, this uneasy consensus was shattered in the mid-80s. In Britain, the Miner's Strike of 1983/84 became a turning point. Television now regularly showed the police in a quasi-military role battling striking workers. As one policeman wrote,

"Even for viewers with pro-police sympathies it was a disturbing sight."
[7]

At the same time, the public widely perceived they had lost the presence of the community policeman on the beat.

Discussions within the police have always focused on how the police balance care with control; the new industrial strife of the 80s revealed the difficulties of transplanting care onto control.[8] Extensive analysis of public opinion conducted by the police themselves concluded that they had to do much work to improve their image. A report by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) revealed

"a decline in the overall level of confidence in the police...(and)... pinpointed a mismatch in police-public expectations about the role of policing: the police valued law enforcement and crime control with all the technological implications, while the public preferred a community policing style of operation."[9]

There were three responses to this: an increase in deploying surveillance technology, an attempt to get back to community policing, and the forging of new relations with the media. These three measures should inform our understanding of the climate in which new, reality-based police shows "work."

As long as the police can win the media through programs like CRIMEWATCH UK, their control of the news flow is guaranteed. In other words they have a vested interest in maintaining the fear of crime, as does every neoconservative politician who needs to swing an alienated electorate behind punitive and retributive political measures.[10]

CCTV (closed circuit television) has become the most popular tool of surveillance and an important part of the modern urban landscape. These ubiquitous cameras work like the ghosts of Dziga-Vertov, capturing everything unthinkingly. These technologies have remarkable capabilities. For example, there are satellite systems which can track the individual and recognize 10 cm. details from 250 miles above the earth, ultrasensitive bugging systems, and cameras which can use light to "see" through walls.[11] All of this is available, relatively cheap, unlicensed, and open to abuse.

Although some countries have debated and protested against this intrusive technology, Britain has seen little debate. Any discussion that has taken place has been in the pages of the "quality" broadsheets such as *The Observer*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, which state that the police's increased surveillance capabilities erode the individual's civil liberties. Academics' silence is more difficult to explain. Perhaps they assume that such technologies prevent crime. But perhaps the cul-de-sac of postmodernism has licensed them to turn away from anything as messy as civil liberties. This academic silence has resulted in a perhaps unintended collusion with the authorities, enabling such issues as civil liberties to be dismissed as old hat.

Whilst media studies is always aware of the debate about the social construction of news and reality, and the persuasiveness of mass media, it has avoided the theoretically messy problem of analyzing representations of crime because it brings to the fore that relation of image to reality (or referent) that it is now impolite to mention in post-modern circles.[12]

A telling example of this silence occurred in the UK early in 1996 with the introduction of the Police Bill. The Bill was a culmination of a series of measures which have radically increased the British police's power to "bug" and survey the public. Legislative measures such as the Interception of Communications Act of 1985 and the Security Service Act of 1989 have gradually wrested control from the judiciary and placed it in the hands of the police. By 1994 the security service had the power to "support the police and other law enforcement agencies in the prevention and detection of serious crime." The 1996 Act would have enabled the police to "enter, search and remove things from a private home" with "a warrant that is not signed by a judge or a magistrate but by the Home Secretary or someone to whom that power is delegated." [13] A few journalists such as Hugo Young and the House of Lords forced a series of amendments but the official Labour opposition provided little or no resistance to the Act. In August 1996, a new version of the Act went through Parliament. The police's powers further to increase the level of surveillance into our lives had greatly increased.

The final set of factors to discuss when contemplating the creation of this climate is the new broadcasting ecology. The 80s and 90s saw a period of massive change in media institutions. I do not have space to survey all of these changes but will briefly

mention a few of the factors that have informed programming before taking a closer look at the new police documentaries themselves.

Changes that the Tory Party had been set on making in the mass media since the late 1970s culminated in the Broadcasting Act of 1990. The conservatives' mission, which finds expression in the Act, was to introduce the market into television. They aimed to break up the comfortable duopoly between the BBC and ITV and sought to displace those BBC "leftists," who they believed misrepresented the Tory government's achievements. The 1990 Broadcasting Act would introduce the more "natural" function of the market economy into the BBC, where innovations such as "producer choice" enabled or rather forced producers to seek out the cheapest possible means of making their programs. The BBC had to ensure that 25% of its productions were commissioned from outside the organization. ITV franchises went at auction to the highest bidder. Yet a typically botched add-on proviso in the Act concerned quality, which led to a plethora of lawsuits from defeated applicants. These changes led to a radically new climate in broadcasting which destroyed all the old certainties and introduced new cost-control measures which many in the industry felt were antithetical to creative work.

"The relative autonomy from the relations of the market afforded by the state's use of law and the body of practice built up around public service broadcasting — the insistence that broadcasting should be run as a public service, with no advertising or carefully regulated advertising and positive program obligations'-has been eroded." [14]

Furthermore, television's internationalization has implications for program style. For programs to make economic sense — the dominant sense of our era — they have to have worldwide marketability. This may be one reason to create spectacles of action around simplistic pictures of law and order. Also, these new police documentaries appeal to producers as being relatively cheap and easy to compile, especially since the police are increasingly keen to lend a hand. Shifts in the broadcasting ecology also mean that producers work under different constraints. For example, short-term contracts unsettle researchers, who have as a main priority holding on to what little work they get. Thus we get a more timid style of television, frightened of offending anyone but determined to aim for the highest ratings via the most sensational route. [15]

Such shifts in government policy have to be taken into account. Trans-global media operators find themselves increasingly comfortable environment, but market shifts which such mediamaking entails also shift the place of public service. Not only do public service producers have to compete with external and internal markets, they also have to please those in authority who give them license to broadcast. Given such conditions, we can explain why it is that new police documentaries emerged in the 90s as a form of cost-cutting, free market enterprise perfectly in tune with government thinking on the market and the value of the law.

THE PARTICULARS...

A closer look at the programs themselves demonstrates the ways in which many disparate strands of television are pulled together to make law and order exciting and relevant. The unacknowledged target of these messages and the objects to be constructed are the citizen and the community.

The scheduling makes clear that a family audience is sought. POLICE: CAMERA: ACTION, X-CARS and CRIMEBEAT are all broadcast between 8 and 9 p.m. — right in the heart of our 7-10 p.m. primetime. Without entirely embracing Raymond William's notion of televisual flow, we can see that the programs have distinctive stylistic similarities which help them to fit in to an evening's entertainment.

The subjects chosen are those suited to what Schlesinger and Tumber calls television's visual imperative

"harnessed both to the needs of policing and the journalistic value of offering verisimilitude to the audience." [16]

As a result we see burglaries, car chases, fights and other amusing law-breaking all "caught on camera." What effect this might have on public perceptions of crime is unknown, but we do know that such programming "in the public interest" creates fear of crime in some groups. Given that most people rarely encounter the police in crime-related incidents and that only 40% have any contact with the police in a twelve-month period, exciting technologically-driven television programs about the police cannot help but inform people's perception of law enforcement agents as controllers rather than carers. [17] That is to say, the shows depict the police as actively controlling community boundaries more than caring for the individuals within a community.

These programs have very dramatic openings, borrowing from both documentary and drama. The music is exciting, pulling us into the show. The images are shocking. And the voice is calm, but unforgiving and clear in purpose. On occasion, we are also offered symbols like scales to drive home the point that this show will present the law as an unwavering ideal as well as an active force in and for the community. Often graphics and stills from scenes combine to create a very powerful opening. In these opening seconds it is clear we are to be offered vicarious excitement wedded to a moral lesson. The shows' blurring of documentary and drama's genre boundaries makes sense in the hunt for ratings but also offers only a sensational view of what police work is all about. High ratings indicate that we as an audience find this combination appealing. [18]

The manner in which we are addressed is important, for sometimes mixed modes of address make our position uncertain. In all three of the shows under discussion, an anchor/presenter addresses the viewer at the beginning. This underscores the clarity of purpose and focus. He (it is almost always a he, and that also speaks to the care/control divide mentioned earlier) is our narrator; he guides us through the unfolding drama. We are never directly addressed by the police. Police narrating would risk threatening the illusion of independence that the program needs if we are to accept it as the work of broadcast professionals with their own code, ethos, etc. and not as straightforward police propaganda.

However, we do get close to the police. We are there in the car or up alongside them as they burst into the building or chase the suspect. We are viewing and judging their performance, and of course, they work very effectively in front of the camera. We are addressed here implicitly as citizens. We are both behind the wheel with the police and, potentially, out there in view of the cameras. This split is

crucial. It creates a lesson in law abiding and it lends excitement to the show. In short, "Oh, that could have been me. I was speeding on that street. There, but for the Grace of God, go I." We never lose the guiding voice of the narrator; he pulls us into the drama and explicitly reminds us of our duty. Our new understanding of dangerous police work, built up by the rest of the program, speaks to us implicitly. Our citizenship is being built on "necessary" fear.

In this light, the narrator plays a special role. In Britain it is fast becoming a tradition for our national news anchors to front these crime programs. Martyn Lewis fronts CRIMEBEAT and X-CARS while Alisdair Stewart hosts POLICE: CAMERA: ACTION. We can see why the newscasters serve a useful purpose from a producer's point of view-as instantly recognizable figures. But also when an anchor like Martyn Lewis fronts a documentary series about car crime, he lends his news persona to the program as a symbol of authority. Furthermore, newsreaders, as we understand them, are calm figures making reasoned pronouncements. Their self-presentation symbolizes the distance and objectivity of the rational. Their calm seriousness serves as a kind of balance in news broadcasts. If we transfer this weight carried by the newscaster to the crime show, then the crime show gains prestige; and figure of the newscaster/ narrator provides a symbol of balance, a balance usually missing from the program's editorializing, scripting and visual presentation.

In *Policing the Crisis* the writers describe news frameworks and how those keep certain deviant images circulating as part of society's "taken-for-granted knowledge":

"Here again by stressing the continuity and stability of the social structure, and by asserting the existence of commonly shared set of assumptions, the definitions of the situation coincide with and reinforce essential consensual notions."[19]

Both the situations that make the news and that comprise police documentaries' real-life drama depend upon the same kind of definitions. What differs is the type of performance. It should be stressed that when newsreaders perform in crime dramas, they do so with a rare passion, as if released from their staid newscaster roles. They now take on a dual function, as authority figures and as citizens "on location," removed from the studio's cold, restrictive confines, and onto the streets. Lewis and Burnett, for example, now speak with a passion they must control while on the news. We "never knew they felt that way" until now when they act like they share our outrage. This shift in performance style from newscaster to emotional crime-show narrator works effectively on us. Our reaction is "extratextual" as we respond to the calm, logical newsreader who later becomes incensed at "mindless" lawbreaking in the crime show; we remain aware of the gap between the calm newsreader we saw at 6 p.m. and the citizen "released" to speak as one of us at 8 p.m..

The crime series also incorporate language which has a role to play in persuading the us. The patois of the underworld easily seduces television viewers with its exoticism. Here, principally middle-class voices attempt to use some of this rare argot, which then adds a note of documentary-style authenticity to the piece. Police drama serials such the thrice-weekly, half-hour, primetime THE BILL boast a high dependence on documentary realism. To gain that "realism," producers of THE

BILL

"emphasize the research incorporated into it, and the deliberate immersion of its writers, actors and creative personnel in the world of real policing, with attachments to real police stations and the like." [20]

In such ways, boundaries between factual and fictional representations become blurred.

Broadcasters also use police language as evidence of the writers' familiarity with the law profession's codes. Trade jargon is deployed significantly. Beyond describing police operations, it is taken on in an effort to share the excitement of the hunt for wrongdoers. In these new documentaries the broadcasters deploy working policemen's jargon to conjure up the underworld's excitement and police formality. So policemen wait in the "ARV" to go to "Level Two" and "Code Green" before the "ops" begin.

Reconstructions combine dramatic and authentic worlds and constitute a small but expensive part of new police documentaries such as CRIMEBEAT. Over fifty years ago, the police started the idea of Reconstruction with the aim of jogging the collective mind of the community in which the crime took place. Nowadays a television reconstruction demands considerable resources and talent. Is it churlish or cynical to suggest that to reconstruct dramatically a crime committed in, say, Colchester would hardly jog anyone's memory living outside Colchester? Of course, if this criminal is "on the run," then you only need a "video-fit" (an electronic form of the wanted poster) to aid recognition, not an expensive reconstruction. Reconstructions result in docudramas on the cheap, but missing the docudrama's editorial responsibility. They blur boundaries seemingly "in the public interest."

The stars are the police themselves. Significantly, when viewers see the police playing and sometimes narrating themselves in episodes depicting the successful capture of criminals, the crime show offers the viewers strong reasons to be grateful for the police force's vigilance. In these new documentaries the police play three interrelated roles that serve to glamorize them and reintegrate them into the public. They play the role of public servants into whose life we are offered a documentary insight. They perform as action-heroes with nicknames and wisecracks, involved in real-life dramas to which they respond with brio and verve. But they also perform to the camera as citizens recalling their experiences, commenting, as it were, about their performances. It is in this new function that they join us as part of a watching community, vigilantly aware of that dangerous "other," the criminal. And, like us, they also watch themselves on television.

The new documentaries most up-to-date and "authentic" signifier is grainy, jerky, surveillance footage. Such imagery has several televisual antecedents, the oldest perhaps being CANDID CAMERA. Parallel to this now in Britain, so-called "docu-soaps" follow people as they learn how to drive, get a new job, etc.. These images come from self-filmed or discreetly shot video footage. Our consciousness of this technology operating around us informs our ambivalence when watching law and order programs. Evidence of that public awareness and ambivalence about the many uses of video technology has slowly emerged in television, where the programming shows evidence of a surveilled community taking part in its own image capture. From the revelatory insights of VIDEO DIARIES to the clipped

eccentricity of VIDEO NATION, from the "hilarious" revelations of pranksters on BEADLE'S ABOUT to the trials and tribulations of Maureen learning to drive in DRIVING SCHOOL, many different levels of the social strata present themselves to the viewer through a surveillance mechanism, especially through the apparently artless form of camcorder video. This bumpy, ragged image seems legitimate, both because of its similarity to camcorder footage elsewhere in television and in contradistinction to the more polished drama around it in the programming spectrum. Its roughness then doubly authenticates it, makes it extraordinarily "real." In this context police agents' revelations serve to normalize them. They come across not as agents of the state with a massively enhanced power to intrude into our lives but as dedicated public servants simply doing a difficult, dangerous job.

When crime shows can wed jagged, raw images to narratives with a very clear moral message, then the genre provides us with a *frisson* of the real, which also connects to our changing experience of citizenship in the fragmented urban landscape. In POLICE: CAMERA: ACTION we are treated to police surveillance footage showing a series of car chases, the vast majority of which end in capture. The idea for this program originated with the police. One police authority in the north of England (Kings Lynn) compiled a collection of many crimes "caught on camera" and sold them to the public. (Most of the people filmed could be identified. It is less clear whether they were asked permission.) In the professional version which goes out on ITV prime time, the newsreader/ narrator Alisdair Stewart makes the message clear: "Drive Safely." The speed of the chasing police vehicle underlines the danger, while music and on-screen commentary from the police help build the excitement. But where does the show locate the view, us citizens? Metonyms of us are seen as the car chase goes speeding by. We simultaneously occupy the position of there and here, a public watched and watching. Only at the moment of capture — the spectacle's main focus — does our identity and with it our roles as responsible citizens become clear. In the surveillance image we all reside as phantoms awaiting determination by the power of the law.

These documentaries create a spurious, momentary identity for watchers and watched. What happens in the moment of capture is that we are all pulled together — amidst this vagueness that we live in, this imprecision, this indeterminacy, this inevitable fragmentation of identity, this quintessentially rootless schizophrenic zeitgeist. We are the audience — safe, warm, sofa-bound and innocent. The criminal is guilty. It's that simple.

"...crime is the great unifier in making everyone a victim and all viewers equal in their potential victimness." [21]

The victim has a long tradition in documentary, and more than a few critics have aggressively protested the tendency in social documentary to turn "ordinary people" into victims. But programs such as CRIMEBEAT do away with much spectatorial ambiguity about victimization, because these people "really are" victims to whom we are drawn and sympathetic. The awkward yet faithful reconstructions helps viewers to bond with victims, thus delivering a level of identification which fiction producers can only dream of. The close ups here do not seem emotionally exploitative but seem simply to record real emotion so that we

the watching community might feel it, too.

Neither public service journalism nor documentary has as an ethos to present only one "side." In these crime shows, however, the only case ever presented to us is that of the prosecution. The criminal has no chance to speak: s/he is the banished, deserving victim of tough law and order. (Surveillance images and programs also create accidental victims — people whose image the camera reveals, yet who are innocent. This is another subject awaiting development.)

These crime shows' stories take the form they do because narrative itself is simple. The new police documentaries adopt dramatic narrative strategies that encourage viewers' involvement. And, as all parents know, narratives are good for conveying a moral lesson. Narratives start and end. They focus, they clarify, and they leave out the wealth of detail that gets in the way of a clear-sighted vision. These programs then function as folk tales for an immoral age. In an uncertain world where our very identity risks continual fragmentation, these programs pull us together and grant us the identity of the innocent. They also elide racism and morality in the way that the shows help us define crime. "The look" carried and conveyed by disciplinary technology seems written into people's skin. Viewers become the camera operators, the new police.

In brief, these programs serve the needs of police, who are seen doing their job very well, and of broadcasters, who are seen fulfilling television's public service function and garnering high ratings. As a by-product, the programs may further legitimize the increasing deployment of surveillance technologies useful to the state. This has not occurred because of an old-fashioned conspiracy theory but as a happy meeting of professionals who find their aims merging as they attempt to re-connect with a lost public.

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

The programs discussed above offer us identities which are useful to the state, that allow of no ambiguity, and that work to unite us against the criminal. They do not ask us to think or reflect, just to react. In such ways, the crime show would fashion us, the audience, into useful citizens.

But my comments are rooted in an old-fashioned belief in public service and broadcasters' responsibility. I believe television still has a function. In Britain, the 200-channel future is just a few months away, and the concerns of socially responsible media academics may become not only outdated but irrelevant. Am I offering here a prescription for a vanishing historical epoch or an utopia in which television contributes to the creation of public sense?

Perhaps we could return to the themes of spectatorship and citizenship played by Debord and Baudrillard, on one side, and John Reith and John Grierson, on the other, in trying to calculate how documentary could proceed. With the advent of new video technologies empowering audiences and the development of community-cable stations documentary has the opportunity to redefine itself as the voice of the individual or group. Citizenship here is thus redefined from below. As people discover a new sense of themselves, the top-down definitions of mass citizenship that have informed mainstream documentary are increasingly seen as invalid. But this increased awareness should not be an excuse to abandon those

documentary subjects that seek to inform us of issues which still affect us as nation and community. The introduction of market-driven imperatives into all sectors of television has meant that series such as *WORLD IN ACTION* face funding crises unless they follow those subjects with the greatest audience appeal. These programs are often titillating and amusing but work to ignore and thus diminish any sense of community or citizenship

The meaning of documentary is changing. I think it is possible to celebrate this change. As Brian Winston and others have argued, it is time we abandoned the tenuous claims and prescripts of Grierson and allowed documentary to speak in new languages. The work of the new video pirates, and that of the unrestricted cable users both represent efforts to seize the moment and to create something that doesn't fit, that is not easily recuperated and offers a challenge both to the viewers and to traditional forms. Out of documentary's abandoning of the real might come work which fosters a new citizenship based on a new conception of the public sphere which is simultaneously wider and more specific than the old elitist prescriptions. It will be an uphill struggle:

"Giant corporations enter the public sphere and transform individuals from citizens and discussants of political and cultural events to culture-consuming spectators of political and media spectacles...new media come to assume tremendous power in the realm of the public sphere."
[22]

An example of television documentary's potential freedom is the BBC's *VIDEO DIARIES*. On the surface, the series appears to offer something of a challenge to television's hierarchy. The format, designed by the BBC's Community Programming Unit, aims to give ordinary members of the public the right to tell their own stories. The BBC receives approximately six applications a day from the public although only a handful of diaries are made every year. The shooting ratio for the program is high — 180:1. The *DIARIES* might depict a coming-out story or one of political struggle or merely a homecoming. Whatever the subject matter, each program's editing takes place with the diarists' assistance and full approval.

At first the very idea of "arming" the viewer with a camcorder suggests aggression and an oppositional potential. Yet *VIDEO DIARIES* remains tied to a liberal humanist discourse on becoming, on the belief that identity is a fixed, discoverable thing. Due to a variety of factors — the BBC's training methods, its editors' inclinations, the hunt for good ratings (even on BBC 2) — the diaries often look and sound surprisingly similar. The Diarists, in effect, reproduce the forms used by mainstream documentarists and end up speaking in a film/video language fast becoming redundant.

The new police documentaries analyzed above are the end of the line, documentary as a mocking shadow of itself, its whole purpose to rearticulate the needs of the law. These shows serve as entertainment rather than present a challenge or help audiences work through, say, the complexities of police-community relations. All that these programs foster in viewers is a spurious identity based on fear. Watching these shows, we become a community of shadows constructed in dirty light, watching others and bound only by the potential to be guilty.

Documentary practitioners have to adopt new strategies to reinvent the form and

undermine its old dependence on documentary realism. At the moment the form is vaguely understood to be related to the operations of the State. The BBC's relationship with the government means that a dynamic tension exists between the two parties where one literally gives license to the other permitting them to say this or that. Some recent cases (Carlton's allegedly fraudulent interviews with drug dealers) have served to further shake the public's faith with independent television. These are the symptoms of old systems trying to survive in a new uncertain climate. And yet the larger issues which unite us as nation, as community, still need to be addressed by television in order to create a new and useful citizenship allowing "full and equal participation in the social order." [23] The ideal solution would be the fostering of a television system which both allows individuals to express themselves in new and diverse program forms and increased public funding and legislative support for documentaries which seek to address those fundamentally political issues that are central to our changing sense of citizenship.

But just how tall an order is this in the late 1990s?

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TV cook shows Gendered cooking

by Phebe Shih Chao

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The creators of, and the participants in, cook shows occupy a site where the interwoven issues of gender, class, and ethnicity, topics at the forefront of intellectual discourse, struggle for redefinition. And, in fact, the site yields abundant contradictions around these issues for those who care to look. For instance, the predominance of men over women cooks on TV is disappointing since the tradition of women working in the kitchen still generally holds. Also, the TV shows seem to assume a bourgeois audience who want to watch Euro-American cooks present bourgeois cuisine; there is a near invisibility of black cooks, men or women, on these shows. Furthermore, craft itself is often downplayed. How well one cooks hardly matters. The eager and perhaps only aim of the producers is to keep audience loyalty to their show. To that end, cook shows have become entertainment; the cooks, stars with recognizable personalities and names. For example, Emeril tries to convey a vicarious thrill to viewers via the live studio audience to whom he feeds tidbits so they will ooh and aah. Yet, who can taste the food this side of the screen?

Gender politics on cook shows tend to support the power structure rather than reflect the daily reality of those who cook. Although in most homes women cook, in an informal survey where I asked knowledgeable viewers to name some cook shows, they came up with these names: Emeril Lagasse, *The Frugal Gourmet* — Jeff Smith, *The Galloping Gourmet* — Graham Kerr, *Yan Can Cook* — Martin Yan, Jacques Pepin, Pierre Franey, and Julia Child and Martha Stewart. Male cooks dominated. Among those on this list, French — which suggests *haute* — cuisine and the word *gourmet* seem to have an influence. Although there are more female TV cooks than before and despite the fact that Julia Child led the way, patriarchy still dominates on television.

Social class is also made abundantly clear. TV cook shows offer visions of food and lifestyle of and for the middle class, especially that sector aspiring to rise higher. The cooks themselves exude bourgeois confidence and their image continues to raise the status of cooks. None of the TV cooks act or cook like hash-slingers. Whatever their origins, they have arrived at realization of their American dream. But they in fact demonstrate little if any *haute cuisine*, which would in its execution at home be too complicated and difficult, too expensive, too unsuited to the daily

life of ordinary Americans. Remember, we grew up with Ben Franklin homilies on thrift and timesaving efficiency.

In a more pointed way, the shows ignore the lower or blue-collar class. No show details how to make your food stamps go further. A class-conscious viewer might ask the following: How can a budget-stretching cook afford the ingredients? Afford paying \$3.00 per recipe by writing the station? If the same recipe is free on a web site, who has access to a computer to find recipes on the web? And who can pay for the cable/satellite shows in the first place?

If anything, these programs emphasize economic and class differences. They separate the audience into those who can afford the life style and those who can't. For example, the overweight in a lower class household cannot keep up with such self-contradictory fashion trends in what to eat, such as the mandate that made complex carbohydrates intensely *in* in the Eighties, intensely *out* in the Nineties. Their families cannot afford the high cost of fresh meat, fish, vegetables; and, after all, potatoes stick to the ribs in ways that goat cheese salads do not. Ironically, there is an economic basis to the often grotesque cultural image of the economically disadvantaged filling themselves up on white bread, biscuits and gravy, macaroni and cheese, doughnuts.

In television cook shows, because bourgeois culture wants to consume immigrant cuisine, ethnic cooking often moves up in status. Reproducing the food of our grandmothers answers our nostalgic hunger for the food of our immigrant past, whether we actually experienced such a past or are conceptually looking for our roots. Other viewers' restless search for variety leads them to explore national cuisines, as does the travel lust of the middle class, who have developed a taste for the ("better"?) tastes of other cuisines.

In the 60s Marshall MacLuhan noted how television has shrunk the world. Thus we've all grown used to the idea of acquiring other cultures at home in front of the TV set. TV viewing leads to a kind of personal colonialism as the acquisitions derived from viewing satisfy our seemingly bottomless desire for appropriating property to call our own. However, the cultural diversity of the new focus on food may also have an utopian dimension. As Julia Lesage pointed out to me, there are some positive implications in these culinary borrowings and take-overs:

"[M]any people's introduction to an ethnic group they do not know well may be through cuisine, a kind of first step...I have noticed...cross-cultural sympathy among people of color in urban areas for each other's cultural and pop cultural offerings, both in cuisine and in mass culture phenomena like martial arts movies"

(Lesage, letter).[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

SOME COOKING HISTORY: "ORGANISING VIRTUE"

Cooking is an endeavor that has traditionally split along gender lines, and class is closely linked with gender. Even when men took over in the public domain of food preparation, gender lines remained clear: women became second-class cooks. From earliest times, in the division of labor, cooking was done at home by women. With the rise of feudal systems that sharply divided aristocratic landowners from the unpropertied, the task of cooking in a grand household passed from wife to

servant. And the hired chef was male, as Stephen Mennell explains:

"It is highly likely that any process of social differentiation will involve distancing from the food of the lower orders and from the women who cook it...[E]ver since Egyptian times it has been men who took over women's recipes for daily cooking and transformed them into a court cuisine...The most likely explanation lies in the origin of the social institution of the court not as a 'private' or 'domestic' household, but as a military establishment" (Mennell, 201).

This would apply to China as well, another civilization with an ancient history, whose known cooks, that is, those whose reputation has continued down the ages, were men. Whether at court or in an important and/or rich household, the servant/cook acted publicly in the sense that he no longer cooked in the private sphere of his own abode. It was public also in that the great man hiring this cook and the dishes which that cook created did it for show, to exhibit conspicuous wealth and power in palazzos, not casas, in great houses, not humble homes.

As the middle class grew, the traditional bringers home of the bacon, the bread winners, to use language that connects food to wages, worked outside the home to keep their wives inside the domestic space. For the middle class on the rise, a key indicator of status was then also to hire servants, chief among them the cook, whose status was significantly higher than that of the scullery maids. Those women whose husbands had the means stayed at home. They employed economically needy women who always earned less than their male counterparts and began first as assistants to male cooks.

"By the middle of the eighteenth century, Duclos could look back to the end of the reign of Louis XIV and remark...that male cooks had...been found only in houses of the first rank and that 'more than half the magistrates employed only women cooks'" (Mennell, 203).

In time, economically disadvantaged women pushed into the public sphere. With the opening of restaurants in Europe — certainly by the time "respectable" women could go out and be seen eating in restaurants, late 18th century in France, mid 19th in England (Tannahill, 327) — women were already working as cooks in these public restaurants.

By the late nineteenth century, schools of home economics and cook books were to change the roles of women of all classes:

"One of the kinds of knowledge that...[promoted] greater uniformity through processes of modernisation and democratisation of cookery styles is nutritional science...The new type of nutritional knowledge was..., mediated by bourgeois ladies teaching in cookery classes and writing cookery books. Their pupils were daughters of well-to-do families and lower-class girls who received their lessons in strict separation...At the end of the nineteenth century, schools of home economics and domestic science were established in Europe and America...the importance of economy, health, hygiene and other bourgeois virtues were heavily stressed. The type of learning can be reckoned among the manifold efforts at *organising virtue* by bourgeois

reformers, physicians and educators, directed at lower-class groups" (Mennell et al, 89. My italics).

It is noteworthy that whatever social class a woman happened to belong to, she could count on the fact that the preparation of food was not so different among the classes. The idea of "entertaining" — cooking by the wife, at home, for other people, without pay — among common folk, as special, beyond the daily ordinary routine, was a late development, as the idea of leisure time for the masses was a controlling myth that took hold in the 20th century. Various historical factors, including the gradual loss of domestic help to industry and white collar work, eventually led, ironically, full circle back to "the lady of the house" as once again her own cook.

Also aimed at women in pre-WW2 United States were the widely distributed cookbooks, that other great disseminator of "nutritional knowledge." Since these directed themselves primarily at a reading audience, they also saw themselves as repositories for certain traditional values. As how-to books, they often emphasized hostessing skills, manners and etiquette, discussing, for example, setting the table and seating guests, as well as teaching the reader how to be a competent cook. The first *Boston Cook Book* in the popular *Fanny Farmer* editions was published in 1896, about one hundred years after the first European cookbooks directed at bourgeois households (Tannahill, 324; Mennell, 1985: 205).[2] Although updated at intervals, they generally upheld the values of the Victorians, aimed at keeping women in the private, domestic sphere.

Cookbooks seemed to have been written for bourgeois households that wanted to eat a wider variety of tastier dishes:

"As the middle class increasingly required their tables to reflect their status, they also discovered that traditional family recipes were not adequate for the purpose" (Tannahill, 322).

But whether cookbooks were for the housewife to plan with her cook, by now in bourgeois households, female, or whether they were do-it-yourself is open to question. However, one could see the cookbook as a democratizing, equalizing move, standardizing measurements and menus, forming tastes for the same foods, closing the gap between mistress and servant] housekeeper. At the same time, sophisticated dining enabled the hostess to rise in society by means of a more refined consumption.

Some accomplished women writers delighted in cooking as a "womanly" art. In France, Colette (1873-1954) in her novels about *l'amour* and *la jeunesse*, usually both *perdus*, delighted in the country French cooking of her youth. To her, food and sex were intimately connected. Her U.S. counterpart was the lively and glamorous M.F.K. Fisher (1908-1992). Fisher's gracefully written books about food and travel to Europe, French cuisine and sophisticated love affairs offer a memorable and heady mix, not so much about nutrition or health and not your usual cut-and-dried recipe, but narratives that focus on the romance of food. Once I read her evocative account of picking the first peas in late spring, setting up the boiling pot of water in the field, and ecstatically describing their taste, I longed to match the experience in my own life.

Nevertheless, *chef*, in France, is synonymous with professional restaurateur, and

such a definition would leave M.F.K. Fisher an amateur or a "scribbler," if one were to use Hawthorne's disdainful word for women who write. Yet, among the first food mavens to inspire fans in the cult of personality, she turned her fans on to food as an intellectually respectable and erotically viable discourse. Without the sensual enjoyment of food, she seemed to say, we might be as deprived as Grant Wood's American Gothic couple, their backs turned away from fields of amber grain and the delights that could have come from them.

Almost the opposite of the kittenish and flirtatious Fisher, Julia Child has had a more wide-reaching influence on U.S. cooking. Matter of fact, down to earth, straightforward, she has brought to women here what hitherto was considered out of reach, namely "the art of French cooking." When she wrote her cookbook in the 50s, an explication of *la cuisine bourgeoise*, the hallmark *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (published in 1961), one must remember Julia Child was a housewife — true, in Paris. But unlike aloof Parisians, she would invite her neighbors in the downstairs flat up for the "fancy" dinners she was experimenting with, as one might in Michigan or Iowa, or Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she has lived for many years. Easy, comfortable neighborliness remains part of her persona. She and her two co-authors, Frenchwomen Simone Beck and Louise Bertholle, opened a cooking school in Child's apartment, somewhat more chic than Home Ec, although by the 70s even the Cordon Bleu had become a certificate almost any aspiring wife could earn. The three cooks were not working class, and they cooked with good bourgeois ingredients including "unhealthy" butter and cream, not yet an health issue in those days. Indeed, to the present, Child blithely insists on butter.

Child produced the first cook-show series for U.S. television (starting February 11, 1963), and she's still hosting a TV show and also making appearances at food seminars. Her career has an impressive longevity. Her enduring popularity may well be based on her self-confidence to know that the show was not the be-all and end-all of her existence. She sent a wonderful message to suburban homemakers, this big, over 6' tall, paradigm of a woman who took things in stride and managed to be wife and cook and public person all at once.

The vital signs were indicated physically: "the grinding of herbs with a mortar and pestle is accompanied by grunts and puffs" (*CBY* 1967, 68). She could cope. Dropping a potato ("someone will have to eat one less") or a large turkey did not cause a mini or maxi breakdown or (Showalterian) hysteria. She famously maintained her aplomb no matter what happened. Dan Ackroyd, in fact, did a gory parody of that aplomb on "Saturday Night Live," where he (she) is bleeding from a cut, then gushing blood, all the while dispensing advice to viewers as she sinks into unconsciousness. That she has been made fun of, on the one hand, and now is solemnly marketed as an elder stateswoman, on the other, only solidifies fans' admirations. By example, she has long reminded us of the free unbuttoned spirit of the carnivalesque.[3]

COOK SHOWS TODAY: "KICK IT UP A NOTCH"

Television cook show are still a miniscule part of the overall programming on the major networks, but they have mushroomed up, like non-metaphorical real fungi shouldering their way through cement, to become the all-day Saturday entertainment on Public Television and to provide the entire fare of the Food

Channel, one of the more successful of the hundred plus cable/satellite channels. The existence of cook shows depends, at least partially, on an observable, empirical fact: namely, the importance, in ways far beyond necessity, of food in people's lives. Assuaging hunger; tasting, feeling full, gorging; looking, feasting one's eyes in the garden or at the market, preparing, cooking; enjoying the aroma of a bakery; growing one's vegetables, vines, meats; promoting health — these are only some of the ways that food figures in one's life. Food and eating satisfy a deep-seated metaphorical hunger, longing, and appetite.

Early capitalism described a system based on supply and demand that assumed a balance between the two. Late-stage capitalism depends primarily on the creation of demand, where none or little has existed, then overloading the new market in the hopes of widening demand. How-to books, whether spiritual (how to meditate, how to achieve inner peace) or practical (how to shed the pounds that overeating adds), have dominated non-fiction best seller lists for years. Similarly, TV features more and more how-to shows — fixing up your house (carpentry and bathroom fixtures, on the one hand, and decorating, on the other), raising vegetables, gardening, cooking, entertaining. Cleverly, these how-to shows flatter viewers by implying that they are capable of doing-it-themselves. The shows give the appearance of necessity (you need to be able to do-it-yourself) and seem to supply a demand (you always wanted to learn but never had the opportunity before).

In fact, in my informal survey, I found that only a small percentage of viewers attempt to undertake the how-to project, whatever it may be. Nor is the pleasure of the voyeuristic gaze in these shows quite what Mulvey had in mind. In some cases, women doing their other clean-up chores may watch the show in the kitchen, a homey familiar retreat, not unlike the cook show itself. Both are far removed from Bosnia and Somalia and perhaps even from nasty occurrences in the neighborhood. In other cases, TV watching, like radio listening, provides *background* image and/or sound.

One viewer who works weekdays and is more than usually conversant with cook shows told me she turns on the TV when she enters her kitchen Saturday morning since the cooks on PBS have already begun cooking by 6:30 a.m. Is this the equivalent of the smell of coffee brewing in the morning? She leaves the TV on all day, only sporadically attentive. Does it comfort her to look over at her set and see someone earnestly applying him/herself to what she should? could? would be doing? She does not think about that, she says. In the years that she has been watching cook shows, she volunteers, she has not bothered to take down or send off for recipes. But she likes picking up techniques, like brushing eggplant slices with oil and baking in the oven, instead of dipping, then sautéing them. For her, watching someone actually going through the process was essential. In the new global community, television has become the presence that the cooking (grand)mom used to be, giving the illusion that she and her culinary sense of tradition and expertise are there for you when you need her.

Other informants say that in the course of viewing TV cook shows, they have become better acquainted with the food served at expensive restaurants, where corporate and business entertaining often take place. Like much of what is *au courant*, the traffic goes both ways. Restaurants with inventive menus teach more people about eating, help create a demand to learn about food; consumers knowing

more about food then become more demanding customers. The message is that acquiring sophistication means as much as money in the move up the social ladder.

As the food becomes more intricate and "foreign," paradoxically there is less attention than ever paid to recipes, ingredients, precise amounts. For example, in an April 1997 episode of the "Frugal Gourmet," he displayed, he did not *prepare*, kasha, not difficult but "foreign" to a large part of the United States, chatting the whole time about things that had little to do with kasha. Supposing you had never tasted kasha, would you know the proportion of water or stock to grain to get the texture you want, and in what form the egg is supposed to be (whole? lightly beaten? hardboiled?) The chef did not expect his television audience to learn from watching.

For some viewers, watching the process, the procedures of cooking, seems entertainment aplenty. For them, the skill involved in chopping fast and fine, the whisking of egg whites in a copper bowl, the choreography of the flourishes taken at the stove, might be analogous to a beautiful serve, or a fine backhand return from the baseline, for the tennis fan. Viewing a tennis match, or any other sports event, has proven wildly successful as entertainment — why not cook shows? Usually, a sketchy knowledge of the rules of the game is helpful, although sometimes not even that is necessary for the couch potato who simply has scopophilia. Learning how to cook specific dishes, honing one's own culinary abilities, or becoming an accomplished cook no longer seem of primary importance to many ESSENCE OF EMERIL cook-show viewers. That disinterest is consonant with the fact that ever more numerous take-out and fast food places negate the necessity to cook at all.

Thus, cook shows have become a kind of entertainment. The show hopes to charm you into wanting to watch it, whether through the cook's personality, the mesmerizing culinary process, or some kind of social acculturation—all of which have little to do with the viewer's own skills. So, analogous to educational institutions whose avowed purpose is to educate,[4] program producers anticipate an audience that yawns and says, "OK. Teach me if you must. But entertain me while you're at it." And a whole slew of entertainers oblige.

Trying to specify what it is they do on the Food Channel, one VP claims,

"We're reinventing the genre...We're saying to people: This ain't your mother's cooking channel."

Her statement reminds us of Tannahill's about the middle-class wish to have their tables reflect their status:

"...traditional family recipes were not adequate for the purpose."

Another VP describing the programs (featuring personalities like Emeril Lagasse or Jennifer Paterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright in "Two Fat Ladies") tells us,

"It's not just about food. It's about food and entertainment." (Neff, s10).

Personality cults and the idea of cook-shows-as-entertainment effectively work together to help producers develop a loyal audience and keep it.

Watching cook shows on PBS, the Discovery Channel, Lifetime ("Television for Women"), TLC (not tender loving care but "The Learning Channel"), and the Food Channel, the viewer sees that there are some differences among the various channels' offerings. Discovery Channel, for example, has a show, "Great Cooks," which is one of the few sites that showcase women cooks for their professionalism. But the program is broken up into short segments of a few minutes apiece. No segment lasts long enough for the viewers to grasp a personality, nor to remember her name. Consequently, "Great Cooks" has not developed a following.

With food as its professed topic, the Food Channel stays the most singularly focused and tries hardest for variety. On the Food Channel, "Three Dog Bakery" stands out as unique among TV cook shows in that it specializes in recipes for dogs. The two hosts are the only male-male team I've seen, joint owners of the show and joint owners of the dogs — in other words, domestic as well as business partners. "Ready, Set, Cook" is a game show between two teams, each consisting of a member of the audience who buys the ingredients with a limited budget and brings it to his teammate, the cook, who has to deal as best he can (a sexist pronoun but true to the episodes I've caught), within a set time limit, with what he's got. This show is perhaps the only one making the cost of cooking the basis for ingredient selection.

Of all the venues for cook shows, the Food Channel is most aggressively organized to sell — and not just sell the show to the public, but time to advertisers, and products to viewers. Emeril Lagasse, in particular, is programmed to appear on the Food Channel several times a day, with some repetition, as if for viewers who couldn't bear to miss him. On these shows, he pitches his combinations and preparations just short of shouting, pushes for his methods, and extols the looks, the taste, the aroma of whatever it is he is cooking. He is constantly self-promoting, all the while talking, like a circus barker or the pre-Cuisinart hawker of a cheap vegetable slicer.

The macho Emeril of "Emeril Live" (does the show's title echo "Martha Stewart Living"?) and "Essence of Emeril" is a unique phenomenon. In "Emeril Live" he overly aggressively plays to the women in the audience who are watching him cook. His favorite *mot*, as when he adds slices of truffle to an already rich scallop dish, is, "Kick it up," or "Crank it up another notch." Like other cook show hosts in the business, he uses his television shows as the centerpiece of a larger business package—

"sponsorable programs including cooking demonstrations, [book] tours and Internet activities" (Neff, s10).

He also owns at least two restaurants in New Orleans and one in Las Vegas. His show seems strikingly pre-feminist, returning to a differentiation between male master chefs and female nonpros.

Most viewers who see enough cook shows would realize that Lagasse is an anomaly. Most male cooks on TV are sexually non-threatening men. The producers go out of their way to star performers like the *Frugal Gourmet* Jeff Smith, Graham Kerr, Pierre Franey, Mario Batali. Like James Beard and Craig Claiborne in the old days, the men haven't changed much — some gay, some well-padded from eating well. It raises the question: to what extent do cook shows draw male audiences and

those men who enjoy cooking? Some U.S. males would identify with Emeril; others would prefer what they decode as camp.

Because most male cooks are not stereotyped in the all-American mode, a whiff of suspicion clings to one or two of them. Still, no one could have expected what hit Jeff Smith:

"three civil lawsuits filed against him since January...eight men are suing the...food evangelist" (*People* 7-7-97, 79).

The accusers had been high school boys in a work-study program assigned to the Chaplain's Pantry (the name of Smith's restaurant!). They asserted that his bland TV image masked a real-life threatening sexual predator. Five years before the charges of harassment and sexual abuse surfaced, Smith's particular performance style was the subject of a long essay in *Harper's*, June 1992. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's study is based on careful research, and her details give us proof of the hours she had spent watching him. No wonder she is so effectively savage! She begins her essay by stating that Smith's

"program is the highest-rated cooking show ever. He...enters...15 million households" (43).

She then goes on to detail Smith's sexual innuendo:

"He is coy. He suggests using 'beef caps' for sausages. Ask your sausage maker about beef caps, he says. So I do some research. I get, by means too tedious to detail, as far as 'bung.' Then I call the Jefferson Market in Manhattan and ask what beef caps are. They hang up on me. They think I am talking dirty. I call The Sausage Maker in Buffalo, New York. 'It's a casing,' a prim voice tells me. Yes, but made of what? 'The p word,' the voice says-'p-e-n-i-s.'"

At one point, Harrison asks,

"Why do people lap up his arts-and-craftsy pretentious approach to food, which owes nothing to art, science, or sensuality?...Why is he beloved?"

Her punch line:

"The short answer is that people are stupid" (*Harper's* 6-92, 46).

Her analysis is sharp and compelling, and mean.

Harrison's attack on Smith, however, seems to have had no effect. For one thing, audiences conditioned by patriarchy were used to taking instruction from male instructors, whether or not the men were role models. Most of our professors are men. Male cooking instructors simply reinforce old attitudes. If we analyze how woman's traditional place is in the kitchen, the domestic sphere, in such a configuration, what is a man doing there? He may be teaching us our place in the home of the postmodern era.

OTHERS' FARE: PRESENTING ETHNICITY

Cooking in books and newspaper columns reflects current Health considerations, the cult of nutrition. In contrast, even as health has become a trendy concern, TV cooking shows seem to minimize anxiety about health issues. Undoubtedly, the production of entertainment entails that in the cozy feel- and taste-good world of food, any alarmist note would be discordant. From time to time, the viewer notes a TV cook's nodding consciousness about cholesterol, as butter and sour cream go into the pan. At one time, *nouvelle cuisine* seemed to gain a precarious hold, but like *haute cuisine*, it was too hard for the amateur cook, not to mention the fact that a normal restaurant patron could not get full on *nouvelle cuisine*, no matter how much money s/he spent. Whipping up pears to substitute for cream in sauces presumes the home cook's willingness to ripen that rock-hard and costly market ingredient, lots of it, and then dirty the Cuisinart with this extra, cholesterol- and calorie-saving step in food preparation.

More shows now find it viable to borrow from Asian cuisine. This cuisine is vegetable and grain heavy, like the "new" Department of Agriculture pyramid. Furthermore, on their Asian coasts, the native populations have always eaten more fish and seafood than meat, which agrees with the new thinking of U.S. nutritionists and healthcare scientists. So Asian ingredients and methods, not Asian *haute cuisine* but rather the everyday, has entered North American cooking. However, the specialized ingredients can pose something of a problem. Although supermarkets routinely carry ginger and tofu, different kinds of cabbage (bok choy, napa, Chinese or celery cabbage), some varieties of chili peppers, and hoisin sauce — none of this true twenty years ago — they don't carry the ubiquitous fish sauce of southeast Asian cooking. Seattle and California on the Pacific Rim were the first to adapt Asian ways, and the California style of good nutrition has been more influential on the way North Americans eat than most people recognize.

One of the most fascinating shows for me is "Yan Can Cook." Like many cooks, the star of this show, Martin Yan, comes from working-class origins. Yan's father owned a small restaurant in the old country, and his son followed the father's trade to become a self-made empire builder, starting out at thirteen as an apprentice cook. His show's publicity emphasizes his M.A. in Food Science earned from the University of California at Davis and his honorary Ph.D. from Johnson and Wales, which is a sort of trade-school community college that calls itself a university, with headquarters in Providence, RI, and at least one branch in Florida. In other words, Yan's background and education illustrate the American dream, and his professionalism is beyond question.

On the other hand, his marketing ploy also stresses his ethnicity, and sometimes on the show he takes the risk of playing a colonized role, a step'n fetchit, or in this case, a toothy grinning Oriental, with exaggerated acting on the verge of clownish.

In one of the best-known half-hours (used on a PBS marathon fundraiser), Yan returns to Hong Kong with his mother, to the natal city. When they go together to the fish market, he goofs around, picking up a lobster and pretending to use it like a telephone. Then he "kicks it up a notch," to borrow a phrase from Emeril. Yan jokingly tells the audience to look at the fresh shrimp — one shrimp by its Cantonese name is *har*; two, *harhar*; and three, *harharhar*. He's counting on the audience to think Chinese consists of nonsense syllables.

His eyes shift to his live audience (to the live crew or bystander) to see if his humor has hit the mark. Does it give him any pause to wonder if he has created too outrageously stereotyped an effect? Even the name of his show, "Yan Can Cook" followed by "So Can You" (Yu is an authentic Chinese surname) has its echoes of the linguistic monosyllables of the old title-and-author jokes like "Brown Spot on the Wall" by Who Flung Dung.

A mildly self-Orientalizing attitude prevails in many ethnic minorities' behavior, by which I mean an insider calls attention to his ethnicity for the purpose of appealing to an existing image which s/he knows outsiders to the culture might have constructed. When we do this, we face the very difficult questions of how much "authenticity" is just right and when does it become self-exoticizing. When Yan chops with his cleaver or speaks with an accent, it is clearly appropriate to him and to the show's diegesis. But when he calls attention to the monosyllables of his native tongue because he knows Americans have a tradition of laughing at the sing-song nonsense of *chin-chin-chinaman*, then his behavior is self-Orientalizing. Had he put his forefingers in the air and made little up and down gestures, then his deprecation of himself and of Chinese American culture would no longer be so mild.

Yan has a great following as an entertainer — my neighbors in New Hampshire certainly watch him. "Oh," I said to one New Hampshire man, "You like to cook Chinese food." What consummate naiveté on my part! "Oh, no. We just watch him because he's so humorous." Since Yan's show also includes a lot of his travels in China and Hong Kong, it draws on touristic interest in local color. In this aspect of travel combined with cooking, he seems to have started a trend, followed by "Tamales World Tour." As a Chinese cook, he's limited to a Cantonese style, notched only slightly higher than Column A/Column B cooking, not new or different.

But, it's important to remember, he also presents the figure of a good son, a gentleman with Confucian values. This persona fits right into neo-con, pre-feminist, U.S. Family country. In another episode, Yan cooks with his mother for the relatives. Even though she is the elder, the mother who, as he says elsewhere, taught him how to cook, Yan emphatically takes the role of the master in the kitchen. He tells her her tasks and condescends to her. In a patriarchal society, where women have far less intrinsic worth, he remains within his rights. His mother seems willing and pleased to play along with her son, who can chatter in English and has become so prominently featured on PBS.

Martin Yan is only one of many specialists in ethnic cuisines. Among ethnic cooks, the hosts' roles tend to be frozen into stereotypes. Chinese men, at least those featured as guests on other cook shows, are energetic, quick, bright, small, and smile a lot, like Yan. Italian women tend to be comfortable, serious and dignified rather than flashy. In "Ciao Italia," Marianne Esposito is pleasingly plump and motherly. She refers continually to her grandmother's kitchen, and she dries, preserves, cans the bounty of her garden. An Italian cook on The Learning Channel, Biba, typifies a more urban version, not plump, but still maternal, practical and down-to-earth. Producers and participants don't seem to have doubts about the televisual presentation of ethnicity.

Of minorities, black chefs are the least visible. Certainly, black cook shows are few

and, if WGBH in Boston is an indicator, becoming fewer. The public station aired, but no longer carries, Dorinda Hafner, whose "The Taste of Africa" visited Morocco, Zimbabwe, Egypt, and Tanzania among other places, and Vertamae Grosvenor, whose thirteen-part series, entitled "America's Family Kitchen," explained and demonstrated Creole cooking, meaning a blend of European, African and Native American influences. The networks seem indifferent to featuring African, Caribbean, and African American cuisine in their variety of cook shows, though African American characters are well-represented in situation comedies and on commercials.

Also, the dearth of African American cook shows may result from a complicated political stance taken by the networks. In U.S. restaurant life, Italian owner/chefs and Chinese owner/chefs are common enough across the country in establishments frequented by the general population. For the affluent, middle-class group of largely white Caucasian diners, they see few bourgeois black restaurants, few black owners. So, for them, there are few black cooks that fit the dominant cultural image of a presentable or bourgeois "chef," especially if that person wishes to present traditional African American "soul food." In fact, the classic Southern cuisine, seen in its haute aspect in New Orleans, has subsumed or co-opted the repertoire of those who historically did the actual cooking. And when it comes to presenting cooks who adopt a comic formula of ethnic self-presentation, as does Yan, this means that the TV cook might act to corroborate traditional servile roles. In terms of asking a black cook to do such an act, the truth of the matter is that television networks are considerably more worried about offending African American viewers than they are, say, about offending Chinese American ones. The legacy of slavery is just too painful and shameful to make fun of.

In their favor, however, the cook shows are going farther afield. In one month, for example, "The Frugal Gourmet" featured both Russian cuisine and Jamaican cooking. Some might think this is going too far in search of novelty. Yet, even in established cuisines, like the Italian, the cook shows no longer limit themselves to Tuscany or Bologna or Rome. They have moved to the Savoyard and the Friulian. Mario Batali on "Molto Mario" featured a dish he called *brovade*, which is julienned turnips pickled in marc. (A pound of grapes pulverized in the Cuisinart, skin seeds and all, was his substitute; even he realized that we can't buy marc at our local liquor store.) The turnips were pickled and stored for at least four days, then sautéed in olive oil and red onion.

Yet I wonder who would cook it? I do not just balk at the ingredients but at the trouble involved, like turning over the mixture every day for four days, all for a dish I've not tasted, as other viewers had not tasted kasha. I myself have traveled and eaten widely, from *tsampas* in Tibet to *menudos* in Mexico, from the aristocratic *bento* lunches in Kyoto to the peasant *fejoada* in Rio, from Turkish *borek* to Uzbeki *nan* to Indian *idali*. Yet until I saw it on "Molto Mario," I had not heard of brovade, though I've spent time in Friuli. Since then, as if in mimesis of one-upmanship, several articles, including one in an inflight airline magazine, have mentioned brovade.

WOMEN COOKING: "GOOD THING"

A survey of contemporary TV cook shows reveals that, generally speaking, the old feminist agenda is beside the point. Today, in the domestic sphere, Martha Stewart

seems to be the only contender for Role Model. But here the question is whether she's merely a "crank[ed] up" version of Woman as patriarchy would have her, a perfect role model in the Home. Her world is centered on the Home. As Home body, Martha Stewart has gone beyond all competition, not just in terms of cooking, but in the larger area of "homemaking," which would include gardening and decorating, among other "*good things*." That's her signature phrase, as in "It's a *good thing*," or "I love *good things*," or her "magazine of *good things*."

Diegetically, in terms of class, she appears to be haute bourgeoisie, quasi-aristocratic, WASP from New England ("county" in British vernacular); biographically, she is of East European heritage from New Jersey and the Midwest. When the title sequence of her show first appears, superimposed on a background of what seems a large stately country seat, one reads "Martha Stewart [and next line] Living." The emphasis is on Martha Stewart and not on life style, living. The absence of a colon between her name and Living suggests that Martha Stewart is not dead; the rest of us are dead.

The visuals behind the credits at the end of her show, as if leaving the house from a back door, gives us a toned-down suburban backyard that only recaptures the general upscale air by stopping at a formally laid out little garden of herbs. Simultaneously, the local carrier hawks the next program, a jarring voice over urging the viewer to watch what's coming up next. The messy closing, the jumbled reality, returns us to our "living." Subliminally, we conflate her considerable capabilities with our own reality. We think that in the midst of our busy schedules, we too can find the time to swag our living rooms and patios in ropes of fir and garlands of roses according to season. For Stewart, the minimalism of modernism, the notion that less is more, has become the eclectic excess of post-modernism. And the consumerism inherent in the idea that only more is more, hence the need to add to and fuss over every bare surface, dress up every meal, even a snack, makes her a real leader, or at the very least, an acute arbiter, in matters of taste in late capitalism.

Even as Woman, the lower class of gender, is in the process of being hiked up, hyped up, Martha Stewart's kitchen, she makes clear, is in her home, not at the studio. For one thing, it is better equipped. It is her own kitchen. In one of the segments when an expansive, male, guest cook is making dough, dusting the counter with flour in rather large gestures, she admonishes him about getting her kitchen messy. Here, the stereotype is still man as intruder, messy intruder even if he is a professional chef.

Stewart's multimillion-dollar business makes her an independent woman, but the image she projects is that of woman in the home. It is complicated to sort out our own reasons and responses, even our own readiness to prepare *millefeuille pate choux* from scratch. Postmodern patriarchy is not feminism. It is still essentialist in the same way that Freud wanted to know "what does a woman want?" Does the modern American woman secretly wish to be Martha Stewart?

One answer is that women desire differently. In contrast to the noisy, prancing Emeril and the intensely cool Martha, the female team "Too Hot Tamales," though the name of their show has unfortunate sexist connotations, features camaraderie and general cooperation. They are postmodern eclectic and self-conscious, and they are feminist sisterly. There is give-and-take, sometimes edgy, between the two

women. The word is that they should be outed, but otherwise, they are as conventional as the heroines of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Helena (tall, blond Mary Sue Milliken) and Hermia (short, dark Susan Feniger).

On a show featuring meringue desserts (#6345 — I have learned to refer to the program by number, as the ad telling us where to send our \$3 has taught me), Mary Sue combined shredded coconut doused with orange juice with beaten egg whites. Instead of the gentle folding most cooks are careful to do, she vigorously beat the two together. Predictably, the air went out of the egg whites, which may not have been whipped until they held their peaks in the first place, and when the meringue mixture was spooned onto a baking tray, they were limp and threatening to spread rather than hold a perky shape. Susan had to comment on the lack of peaks. Earlier in the show, Mary Sue said of Susan's enthusiasm, "Now that she's done it three times, she's feeling very confident." The comment can be read as competitively sparring, or as naturally high-spirited, repartee. But even if they cook at Border Grill in Santa Monica (are "professionals," in other words), they project an image of amateur fun in the kitchen. Easy! You too can do it! If this is a strategy towards bonding with their viewers, I'd say it's probably successful. Having added "Tamales World Tour," an effort to broaden into ethnic cuisines, they continue to convey an image of no sweat, you can acquire another cuisine as handily as you've mastered your own. However, although basics are covered, there's not much depth here for the serious cook.

We are beginning to see changes in cook shows. The most lively cook show on TV at the moment is "Two Fat Ladies" produced by the BBC. It was introduced on the Food Channel to the American public in September 1997. Typically, one of the two fat ladies, Jennifer Paterson, commented:

"I used to get put off by the *Ladies* because it sounds like the public lavatory" (*People* 10-20-97, 138)

Their animation credit sequence, and live action as they are traveling to another venue, shows them zipping around on one motorcycle with an attached sidecar. Paterson, the driver, wears a WWI airman's leather helmet, while Clarissa Dickson Wright, the passenger in the sidecar, looks suitably unflappable. I have already mentioned them as carnivalesque. These women fit several transgressive categories: their obesity, their lesbian-suggestiveness, and, in an age of media-formed esthetics, their age (they are not young and nubile). Unruly women that they are, and Rabelaisian, their bawdy one-liners, lascivious leers, abrupt guffaws are precisely the signs of carnival. On one show, they are cooking for a large group of Scouts, and one lady asked the other, "How do you start a fire?" to which the other answered without missing a beat, "By rubbing two Boy Scouts together."

"Appetite" is a term we associate with both food and sex, as we could see with M.F.K. Fisher. Paterson and Dickson Wright take appetite into the postmodern age, with their verbal innuendoes about sex, while they are actively in the process of making tempting, irresistible food. In this particular moment when Health is the prime concern in eating, neither fat lady gives a damn. Their bubble-and-squeak uses so much lard that any health-minded viewer might cringe; they revel in telling us we must put in yet more fat when we turn the potatoes over. If we're not willing to do so — then we shouldn't bother to cook the dish. The two fat ladies lust and eat for us. They are the transgressors, going against an establishment that hates desire

and preaches puritanism in every aspect of life. They take the heat as we watch with pleasure.

To sum up briefly: Although, as I have argued, the audience watches cook shows for entertainment, including visual pleasure and escape, the explicit text of these shows broadcast the possibility of mastery. Despite the modus operandi of business first, principles when convenient, a kind of egalitarianism exists at an unseen level. Anyone — female/ male, straight/queer, bourgeois/ working class, Norwegian/ Uruguayan — can master the intricacies of the kitchen, if s/he wants to. In fact, the larger genre of How To shows, of which cook shows are a subgenre, upholds the myth of mastery. From computers, carpentry, cooking, dancing, the stock market, money making, to human relationships — any TV viewer can master it.

The cook show is a particularly good site for studying issues of gender, interwoven as it is with class and ethnicity. There is a long separate history of men cooking and women cooking, with the result that, although more women have entered the field of cook shows, men still have an edge at least in part because of the old standard of professionalism. M.F.K. Fisher and Julia Child have been influential role models as counter-influences to male professionalism. TV cook shows today are about bourgeois cuisine for bourgeois viewers, who have developed a taste for ethnic cooking. As time goes on, it seems ironically clear that cook shows belong with the category of spectator sports; they are no longer really about viewers becoming better cooks. A sampling of cook shows with attention to individual cooks shows us the retrograde macho of Emeril, the non-threatening character of other male cooks, the scandal of Jeff Smith, the self-Orientalizing of Yan, the excesses of Martha Stewart, the sororal image of Too Hot Tamales, the fresh liberating aspects of Two Fat Ladies. Among all these cooks, some tell us there's life and the capacity for change in the genre.

NOTES

1. In her letter, Julia Lesage was interested in "courting the Other," a major idea that deserves serious exploration beyond the scope of this paper.
2. Tannahill explained that because of the spread of literacy, "far more women were now able to read..." (322).
3. Food, eating and excreting, was a source of Rabelaisian laughter; Rabelais the source of Bakhtin's carnivalesque.
4. In an essay in *Harper's* (Sept 97) Mark Edmundson discusses student demand for education as entertainment.

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Selena ¡Siempre Selena!

by Chuck Kleinhans

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Talent, determination, romance, beauty — Selena Quintanilla Perez had it all. And family and community support, international recognition, and commercial success. Of course, the film had to simplify the presentation of her life, but what first interested me about SELENA was how the story varied from the norms of the Hollywood biopic. [1][[open notes in new window](#)] Traditionally, family is marginal or nonexistent in the screen version of a real life. Where origins and ethnicity are important, the script usually quickly erases or has the main character overcome them as s/he begins to apprentice in the struggle for success. Or sometimes the family hinders the hero and growth comes from putting family behind.

But in SELENA family and ethnicity are central to the singer's entire career. It's easy to see why Selena's father, Abraham Quintanilla, Jr., chose to make a deal with director Gregory Nava for this picture because Nava's previous films are so family-centered (EL NORTE, MI FAMILIA/MY FAMILY). Not only did the star spend most of her life on the road traveling with the family musical act, but when married, Selena and her husband — who played lead guitar in the band — lived next door to her parents. Selena didn't leave home to become a success. She took home with her literally in the family's tour buses.

The family theme anchors the SELENA narrative. And thus the film exudes positive "family values." Indeed SELENA is a (rare) classic example of the "positive image" film. It depicts Selena as a thoroughly admirable human being. And the most compelling part focuses on the Oedipal father-daughter relationship. Abraham (Edward James Olmos) is the classic stage father, living out his frustrated dreams of making it in the music world of by pushing his own children forward. Youngest daughter Selena exhibits a "natural" talent and becomes the focus of Dad's attention. She flourishes under his attention and tutelage, but inevitably she chaffs at his assertion of patriarchal authority over her sexy stage costumes and her budding romance with the band's guitarist.

What's particularly compelling in this story is the way the film depicts of Dad not just as comically wrong (a sitcom staple) but also showing him as forgiving and willing to moderate his temper after an outburst. Thus the film implies that Selena gets her strength as a performer and young woman from imitating Dad's stubborn

determination. As often in real life, separation is easier for the daughter than for the father. In this she is aided by her brother and sister, and especially her mother, who is always supportive and understanding, adapting to Dad's initiatives, impulses, and orders, and guiding the kids through the situation.

If the film provides this image of family life as a myth for the audience, it is a comforting myth, but one which also contains its own revealing truth. In her transformation into adult heterosexuality, Selena (played as an adult by Jennifer Lopez) also ends up transcending her mother's need for a "strong man." Selena is the initiator in her romance, proposing the first date and eventually eloping into marriage. Husband Chris (Jon Seda) is the ultimate handsome, quiet, "nice guy," accepting a woman with a mission and a career. Here is the conservative middle class Latina fantasy: Daddy's girl becomes a self-reliant, forceful career woman with a man who will become a supportive husband and good father.

SELENA's personal narrative tightly interweaves with its professional one, the American success story, which also entwines with the ethnic drama. In the opening, the film flashes back from Selena's triumph at the Astrodome a month before her murder (discretely omitting that the occasion was an annual cattle show and rodeo) cutting to her father's youthful aspiration singing doo-wop. Rejected because of both Anglo racism and Mexican American audience's dedication to traditional Tex-Mex dance music, Abraham's frustrated dreams re-emerge twenty years later after his family has assimilated into the Anglo world of industrial Lake Jackson, Texas, where he worked as a shipping clerk for Dow Chemical. Seeing his daughter's talent, he trains the kids, then in a reawakening of ethnicity opens a Mexican restaurant where the kids perform. When that dream goes bust and the Quintanillas have to sell the restaurant, the family moves back to Corpus Christi, living with relatives, and thus become reinserted in the Tejano community.

SELENA indicates that the family had already achieved "middle class" status and successful assimilation into the Anglo Texas mainstream. The film sketches this with scenes of blond neighbors in the childhood segment. From then on the film shows the family's and especially Selena's new struggle for status, for financial success, and for professional recognition on the changing terrain of ethnicity. The film implies that this new form of assimilation is more authentic. As a musician, Selena had to overcome many barriers: the inferior position of women in the music scene, the audience's prejudice against innovation, and the limited size of the Tejano audience. The film shows the family musicians solving these problems by individual determination, appealing to the youth in the audience, and crossover beyond a regional and ethnic audience.

TEJANO MUSIC

The context of Selena's career is the evolving world of Tejano music. Tejano (Texas Mexican) music itself embodies assimilation and change. It originates in the fusion of Spanish-based local music with immigrant-imported German polka rhythms and instruments in 19th century Northern Mexico and Texas. Norteño (encompassing both sides of the border region) expanded from a folk base to a vernacular (commercial regional ethnic) phenomenon in the early 20th century with recordings and radio. Its most famous traditional star, Lydia Mendoza, proclaimed the "singer of the poor" during the Depression, gained fame not only from live performances of love ballads, but also from the mechanical reproduction

of her sound, first on live radio, then on records and broadcasting the recordings on radio which freely crosses the Rio Grande.

Les Blank's documentary CHULAS FRONTERAS (1976) places Tejano music within a distinct culture of food, music, dance, and socializing.[2] The film gives a good sense of corridos, ballads which often describe the history of Tejano people—originally Mexican farmers and peasants who were incorporated into Texas through the imperial expansion of the U.S. during the Mexican American War and driven off their land and disenfranchised by Anglos.[3] Subsequent new arrivals from Mexico were typically pushed into the migrant agricultural labor force, where they ranged from California to the Northwest, to Colorado, and up the Mississippi River valley as far as Minnesota in search of seasonal work while returning to South Texas off season. Like African American blues, in this music themes and images of travel echo the actual life of the labor force. And in this context, the songs of love, separation, and yearning have a shadow background, referring to the realities of migrant working-class life.

Within this borderland music, the Tejano genre most fundamentally functioned as a working class dance music using polka beat and rhythms and a characteristic button accordion, bass, drums, and *bajo sexto* guitar. Live performance in local dance halls provided audiences with the core experience, reflecting the mixture of:

1. gendered social segregation between men and women in Mexican American culture,
2. the importance of weekend evenings for heterosexual socialization for both younger and older generations,
3. dance (and drinking) as a physical recreation,
4. the roadhouse dancehall as a gathering place for a predominantly scattered rural population that depends on vehicles for transport, and
5. the creation of musicians who often held down regular weekday jobs and who played professionally on weekends.

Relative to other Mexican musics, Tejano always carried a "low class" orientation in contrast to, say, mariachi music, with its immaculately costumed musicians and "refined" singers. Mexico's natives often looked down on their Tejano cousins for having a corrupted culture and dialect. By the 1980s the Texas variant also had younger musicians and performers like Selena who grew up in urban settings and who were open to rock 'n roll, African American rhythm and blues and funk, Latin American sources, such as the Colombian cumbia, and Anglo pop music influences.

SELENA encapsulates this transformative quality of younger musicians in the Tejano scene by showing young Selena learning to sing in Spanish from her father, dance the cumbia from her mother, and aspiring to sing like Black disco diva Donna Summer. Furthermore, the real-life Selena's actual transit through an evolving professional music career reveals complexities that the film hides. As a child, singing with her brother, sister, and father under the recirculated name of her father's doo-wop group, Los Dinos (The Guys), Selena sang in English. She had a pop rock repertoire of late 70s hits: the Eagles, the Doobie Brothers, etc. The family then crossed over into the Spanish-language Tejano touring performance market when she was 14. The new Selena y Los Dinos also recorded on independent Texas labels. Finally, billed as just Selena, the star began to cross over into the larger Mexican American market. But, most significantly, her real success

in the expanded area depended on her gaining commercial success in Mexico (represented in the film with her Monterrey concert). The music industry's rule of thumb is ironic: success in the general Mexican American market must be preceded by acceptance in Mexico.[4]

Understanding the pattern of Selena's success thus involves recognizing the distinct national/ regional differences between Tejanos and Mexicans. Mexican tastemakers such as DJs and journalists tend to look down on Tejano Spanish pronunciation and Spanglish idioms, as well as faulting the lack of "true" Mexican culture in their Texas cousins. In the film, this is dramatized in a famous incident in the Selena legend, where she had to appear before the press in Monterrey, Mexico. Aware of her faltering Spanish, she made a initial grand gesture of greeting each journalist personally with a phrase and a hug, before the q and a. Charmed, the journalists forgave her lapses in language.[5]

The regional differences between Tejanos and other Mexican Americans operate in a similarly significant way. Thus while Selena early on attained marketing success and critical acclaim within Tejano circles, the cross over to Mexico also assured success in *Billboard's* "Mexican regional (Mexican-American) charts. At a later stage, with success in those markets, Selena could cross over again, this time to *Billboard's* "Hot Latin" charts and eventually win a Grammy. At the same time, Selena expanded her repertoire of styles to include Afro-Caribbean beat, making music videos that could be played in Latin American, and even a number with the Barrio Boyzz, a Niuyorican group. With this expanded repertoire, the last cross over EMI Latin, her record label, engineered was to the English language pop market, and that was attained only with the release of the *Dreaming of You* CD after her death. Thus she returned to where her father started and where she started — singing English language pop.

These ethnic/ regional/ national/ international spatial and demographic divisions and borders exist historically, socially, and economically. And border crossing takes place not only with musical style, but also with marketing strategy. While the film naturalizes the climb to success, in fact, Selena's career was increasingly managed within the framework of industrial practices.

The business of Tejano dramatically has changed in the past quarter century. CHULAS FRONTERAS shows an older musician who owns a record store and who also operates a makeshift recording studio and presses his own records in a garage in the early 1970s. A decade later, the Univision cable network, one of the principle Spanish language outlets, carried the JOHNNY CANALES SHOW from Selena's hometown of Corpus Christi. The entrepreneur-showman Canale featured Tejano acts videotaped in his club, and through tv, carried the music to a national "Latin" audience. Selena appeared frequently on the show which took her electronically much further than the family's live performance in Texas venues allowed. In part, Tejano music was able to hold onto its identity because a very large number of South Texas radio stations were locally owned. However in the 90s with changes in communications regulations, independent local stations were (and still are) bought up at a rapid rate by radio chains which generated local playlists from a central headquarters with an eye to the national charts and thus pushing a more pan-Latino and pop-oriented style. Thus in 25 years, the local and regional was increasingly subsumed under the national and global.

Tejano music has the ability to mutate and change, both its strength and a symbolic form of ethnic transformation embodied in the concept of crossover.[6] In the film, the first crossover takes place within the Tex-Mex community, dramatized by having two low rider *cholos* recognize and adore "Say-lee-nas." [7] The next step is Selena's topping the Tejano charts through radio and recorded music, transcending the traditional limits of Tejano live performance. When Selena hits number one with "Como La Flor," she is also poised to move beyond Texas to the entire Southwest, and also to crossover into Mexico.

In the film, Tejano music's commercial, technological, and social change is portrayed largely within the framework of family. But in historical reality, in 1989 and 90 major transnational record companies such as Capitol EMI and Sony were eagerly signing up Tejano acts previously represented by regional independent labels. EMI's José Behar, a Cubano with executive experience in the Hollywood music business, engineered Selena's career after signing her. He believed (and proved) that building her as an international Latin star was key to her successfully crossing back to English popular music. Increasingly her career moved from small venues to large concerts, and most importantly to recorded music — where the big money lies.

LATINO IDENTITY

Selena's father, a second generation Mexican American, went to a public school in Corpus Christi where children who spoke Spanish were sent to the principal's office for suspension or a beating.[8] That Abraham raised his children speaking only English is understandable. But Selena has to learn to sing in Spanish and later awkwardly speak in Spanish. Her relation to Spanish fluency stands symbolically in relation to a US culture and politics where salsa has surpassed catsup as a condiment, but Proposition 187 and attacks on bilingual education continue to punish ethnic identity.

SELENA mobilizes audience sentiments in a progressive direction against racism and sexism. In the opening flashback, we see the original Los Dinos rejected by an Anglo club owner who refuses to have them play in his segregated club. But in a Tejano roadhouse, Los Dinos cause a small riot when they sing doowop in English to a Tejano audience that wants to dance. The implication of pairing the two events is to indicate the Anglo club owner is racist, but that the Tejano audience is culturally backward. Later, as a teen performer Selena is underpaid by a Tejano concert promoter who explains that she's "just a woman." But her subsequent superstar status puts a lie to that.

Near the end of the film Selena goes shopping before the Grammy awards ceremony in a large L.A. mall. When she and a friend ask to try on a dress in an expensive boutique, the Anglo saleswoman says they couldn't afford it. But a Chicano stock boy spots the star and word of mouth produces a huge fan rush of Chicano store employees and shoppers, turning the tables on the boutique blondes who don't know who Selena is. Thus triumphs over sexism and racism emerge not from politics but from consumption: equality and democracy are marketplace values.

In one of the film's best moments, Abraham begins an inspired rant about how Mexican Americans have to be more Mexican than Mexicans and more American

than Americans. "We've got to know about John Wayne *and* Pedro Infante...Oprah *and* Cristina. American food is too bland and yet when we go to Mexico we get the runs!" Selena responds, "It's a good thing we have *frijoles* and *tortillas* to give us strength for the job ...and *menudo*!" As we see later, Selena actually fortifies herself with a diet of Doritos and pepperoni pizza. She has become assimilated while maintaining a certain Latino identity within U.S. commercial culture: a true Taco Belle.

In the film, after her triumph in Monterey, Mexico, Selena is recognized by the Mexican press as "a genuine artist of the people." Thus in a reversal of the traditional pattern befitting the NAFTA Nineties, mass culture becomes the vehicle for folk culture. Selena confides that performing confirms for her that "my dreams were the same as all those people in the audience." The star who crossed over into success in Mexico becomes the embodiment of the community, of La Raza, and beyond.

SELENA creates an interesting mythology about the performer's success. In the film version, record execs arrive very late in her career. When music industry execs say they want her to produce a crossover album, indicating she could be the "next Gloria Estafan," they ask Abraham, "Is she ready?" "She's ready," he affirms, adding, "We've been ready for a long time." The *we* is significant — it represents the family, the Tejano music industry, the Tejano community, and in the fullest sense all Mexican-Americans and even all Latinos. Instead of assimilation as the erasure of ethnic identity, something the family already achieved in Lake Jackson, the mainstream becomes transformed to accept Tejano, to accept a female performer, to celebrate diversity without erasing identity.

In a brilliant article on changing Latina identities, "Jennifer's Butt," Frances Negrón-Muntaner considers Selena in relation to the body of Jennifer Lopez, the film's star, a Niuyorican. Among other points, the essay argues that Lopez, like Selena, presents a distinctively "curvy" body :

"In gendered terms, the big rear end acts both as an identification site for Latinas to reclaim their beauty and a 'compensatory fantasy' for a whole community." [9]

Thus ethnic identity is expressed corporeally:

"While it is arguable that a Latino identity 'exists' as a cultural formation across the United States, and that this identity has erased or displaced nationalist investments, it is also undeniable that for those born and raised in major urban spaces with significant and diverse 'Latino' communities, the construct, although not exhausting our complexity, has constitutive materiality In [her] marketing and audience-building trajectory, Selena went from being a Tejana (a territorialized 'regional' identity) to being a Latina (an 'ethnic minority'). 'Latino,' in this case, does not refer to a cultural identity, but to a specifically American national currency for economic and political deal making: a technology to demand and deliver emotions, votes, markets, and resources on the same level as other racialized minorities." (183-84)

Dramatizing the point, Negrón-Muntaner discusses an episode of the Univision talk show, *Cristina*:

"As in other talk shows during the promotion of SELENA, there came a moment during the interview when the question had to be posed to Jennifer Lopez: '¿Todo eso es tuyo?' (Is that body for real?) In other words, is that big butt yours or is it prosthetic? Although a fair question for many Hollywood actresses' faces and breasts, Jennifer Lopez smiled as if she had been waiting a long time for this moment. She stood up, gave a 360 degree turn, patted her butt, and triumphantly sat down: 'Todo es mio.' It's all mine." (186)

The assertion of identity within diversity-this is the central fantasy of SELENA-the performer, the star, the celebrity, the movie. The movie omits it, but the real Selena had already achieved this status in a commercial way: she was the sole Latin celebrity endorser for Coca Cola in the U.S. Latino and Mexico markets: Siempre Selena! Siempre Coca-Cola! (And in the past year, Jennifer Lopez has been appointed the new Coke Latina star, with commercials remarkably similar to Selena's.) Regionalism thus has its place within the New World Order — but the vehicle requires success within the capitalist system. Further, it consists of fitting identity to the market, but the market itself consists of a sector which appeals, through the flexibility of youth, to a Pan-Latino identity that mixes nationalities, cultural traditions, degrees of assimilation and acculturation.

The contradictions of identity within US and transnational culture are fundamental cultural *and* economic ones. The latter term — economic contradiction — provides the film's signifying absence — that which the film cannot speak in either Spanish or English. At the time of her murder, Selena was breaking further away from her father's control of the music end of the family business. She insisted on her own autonomy as a businesswoman in running her boutiques and clothing design operation. She aspired to own a factory manufacturing clothing in Monterey. With the open door of NAFTA, had she lived longer, she might not only have become the first big Tejano crossover star, but also the first Latina Kathy Lee Gifford.

NOTES

An earlier version of this essay was commissioned for the 1998 Chicago Latino Cinema Film Festival catalogue. I want to thank Professor Isidro Lucas for that opportunity. My revisions benefited from comments by members of a workshop at the 1998 Chicago Latino Film Festival, and discussions with Tim Anderson, Amy Beer, Ilene Goldman, John Hess, Julia Lesage, Chris List, and Chon Noriega.

I. My central text here is the Hollywood film, but inevitably and especially because of the close proximity of the star's early death (March 1995) to the release of the film (March 1997) and the fact that she was a rising star whose star image and myth were still being created, this is also about the media-created Selena text, the various "authorized" versions of her life such as the Quintanilla family authorized documentary *Selena Remembered* (d. Cecilia Miniuchhi, narrated by Edward James Olmos, who plays her father in the biopic), the legends and facts (particularly as documented on the major Selena website —

<www.ondanet.com:1995/tejano/selenanews.html>.

This site has links to other significant Selena sites. It would also be possible,

following the recent stretching of the boundaries of documentary, to read the film SELENA as a dramatized documentary, though I find the biopic model more interesting and productive. George F. Custen's *Bio/pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992) provides an excellent overview of the genre. My central reference point for the facts of her life is the unauthorized biography *Selena: Como la Flor* by Joe Nick Patoski (NY: Boulevard, 1996/7), a journalist who wrote about Selena before and after her death.

2. A description of CHULAS FRONTERAS (Pretty Borders) can be found in Sharon R. Sherman's *Documenting Ourselves: Film, Video, and Culture* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1998).

3. The Robert Young film THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ (1983) depicts the story of a famous Tejano corrido. The narratives of resistance to Anglo authority continue today in controversial "narcocorridos" which celebrate drug running.

4. An analysis of Selena written after her death but before the movie considers her star image in terms of cross over and borderlands: Ramona Lierra-Schwichtenberg, "Crossing Over: Selena's Tejano Music and the Discourse of Borderlands," *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*, ed. Thomas Swiss, John Sloop, and Andrew Herman (Malden MA: Blackwell, 1998) 205-218.

5. The individual greeting to all present is required in all social gatherings in the extended family in Latin America. Selena treated the journalists like a good kid greeting all the older relatives — showing she knows the rules of Latin courtesy- which many second and third generation Mexican American kids might forget.

6. Most Mexican American format radio stations traditionally hired Mexican nationals as DJs, programmers, and announcers who were thought to pronounce "proper" Spanish as opposed to Tejano Spanish. In particular, the Los Angeles market was impossible to enter without validation first in Mexico, reflecting the importance of Spanish language radio and TV for the first generation arrivals. Selena achieved touring, recording, and radio success in Texas, and the Tejano diaspora in New Mexico, Arizona, Washington state, Illinois, Indiana, and even Cubano Florida before the crossover to Mexico.

7. In the film she and her family pronounce the same "Seh-lee-na" which is an English variant on the Spanish pronunciation of "Sah-lay-na." Her family nickname was "Sel."

8. Abraham Sr., the first generation arrival, was a devout Jehovah's Witness. Abraham Jr. and his children were not full members of the church, but followed its theology, a point missed by many commentators who assume the family was Roman Catholic. In many ways the Jehovah's Witness church is quite conservative- it does not permit even square dancing, and proscribes Christmas carols- so Selena's professional work probably would not be an acceptable activity.

9. Frances Negron-Muntaner, "Jennifer's Butt," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 22:2 (fall 1997) 192

Boogie Nights Will the real Dirk Diggler please stand up?

by Peter Lehman

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BOOGIE NIGHTS (1997) was widely anticipated as a film about porn. Indeed, once the film actually appeared, many reviews and articles echoed this theme promoted by the film's advance publicity campaign. Review titles include the following: "BOOGIE NIGHTS takes trip through 70s porn industry" (Downing, 8E); "Adventures in the Skin Game" (Vorhees); and "Putting the plot into '70s porno" (*USA Today*). A Knight-Ridder AP Wire Service headline about the film declares,

"BOOGIE NIGHTS does for the porno industry what NASHVILLE did for country music" (Knight-Ridder).

While exactly what NASHVILLE did for country music remains unclear, clearly these and many other reviews and commentaries share an impression that BOOGIE NIGHTS mainly deals with porn and/or the porn industry. As such, BOOGIE NIGHTS takes its place along with THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT (1996), another recent Hollywood film widely received as being about porn, in this case, magazine porn rather than movie porn.

In some sense, it seems that Hollywood has a sudden interest in porn — *seems* is the key word here. In this essay, I will analyze the representation of porn in BOOGIE NIGHTS and relate that representation first to that in THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT and then to representations of the male body in pornography as well as in feature films of the 90s.

Several critics and commentators make a connection between BOOGIE NIGHTS and THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT, though not in the same manner I do. Janet Maslin writes,

"Some of the most distinctive American films of recent years — PULP FICTION, THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT, L.A. CONFIDENTIAL and now this — have evoked a sleaze-soaked Southern California as an evil and alluring nexus of decadence and pop culture."

Here the connection is one of aesthetics (the "most distinctive") and setting

(Southern California).

Charles Ealy makes yet another connection between the two films:

"THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT collected critical raves and Oscar nominations last winter, but the saga of the *Hustler* publisher sagged at the box-office."

In this case, Ealy makes his connection between the two films while speculating about the potential box-office for films about porn and so wonders whether the same box-office fate that greeted THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT awaits BOOGIE NIGHTS.

But a related aspect of BOOGIE NIGHTS has also received wide attention in the press and become part of the film's original reception context: namely the emphasis on the male body and specifically a graphic shot which occurs at the end of the film showing a close up of the main character's much discussed large penis. Again several headlines indicate this critical emphasis. Maslin cleverly titles her review, "An Actor Whose Talents Are the Sum of His Parts," while another article puns with the title, "BOOGIE NIGHTS leaves a big question" (Koltnow). I will consider not only how this emphasis on a large penis is part of how the film represents porn but, equally importantly, how such representation in BOOGIE NIGHTS relates to a number of 90s films which have also, somewhat surprisingly, graphically represented the penis.

In my JUMP CUT essay, "Will the Real Larry Flynt Please Stand Up?" I argued that the reception context for THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT essentially developed along the lines of an anti-porn feminist critique and a First Amendment freedom defense, the latter coming from Milos Forman, the film's director. Forman proudly declared that he never consumed porn and, in fact, had never even seen an issue of *Hustler*. In contrast, anti-porn feminists charged that the film cleaned up all Flynt's offenses both as a pornographer and a human being. Between Forman's high ground and the anti-porn damnations, porn itself became lost.

Neither the film nor its loudest detractors and defenders for a moment considered porn as a complex form of representation that fulfilled varying functions for its consumers. That there could be anything good, useful, or valuable in porn was beyond either the film's imagination or the imaginations of those who attacked or defended it. Everyone apparently knew what porn was and the only real issue was whether we should banish it to hell or die defending it so that we could have our freedom of speech. God forbid that anyone would admit to liking porn because it turned them on, amused them, or gave them insight into anything about our culture's notions of sexuality. In effect, porn itself got lost in THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT and something very similar has happened in BOOGIE NIGHTS.

If porn gets lost in First Amendment issues in THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT, it gets lost in BOOGIE NIGHTS by becoming a metaphor for the 70s and 80s. Again, several headlines of reviews and commentaries as well as the kickers accompanying them reveal this metaphoric connotation.

"The Wheeee! decade: Hollywood takes on sex in the 70s" (Ealy);

"Bring back the polyester daze with two new films" (Philpot); or

"Rakes Progress: The 70s revival isn't just about nostalgia for bell bottoms. It's about Sex. From BOOGIE NIGHTS to THE ICE STORM, the rogue male is back" (Leland).

Two of the above-cited headlines about porn even specifically mention the decade of the 70s.

Indeed, as many reviewers noted, the first part of BOOGIE NIGHTS characterizes the adventures of its hero, Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg), as part of the carefree, anything-goes era of 70s sexuality. Porn chic, casual sex and nudity a la hot-tubs and drugs are the norm, and everyone seems happy and content. There is no price to pay. The 80s, on the other hand, contain nothing but paying the price. In the 80s those associated with the world of 70s porn commit suicide, lose custody battles for their children, can't get loans to start their legitimate businesses, or get killed in drug shoot-outs. Even porn itself seems degraded from the narrative forms of 35 mm theatrical features with stories, production values, and stars to the 80s cheap amateur videos. During the 80s, it seems, we pay the piper for the 70s, and little else.

Yet a third aspect of the reception context for BOOGIE NIGHTS involves the nearly simultaneous release of THE ICE STORM (1997). As several critics have noted, THE ICE STORM also refers explicitly to 70s porno chic (indieWire). In a dinner party scene which occurs near the beginning of the film, conversation turns to Harry Reems and DEEP THROAT. The reference seems simply to indicate that these bored, upper-middle class Connecticut WASPS have an accepting, non-judgmental sexual lifestyle. Sex is in the air, as it were, the times are changing and porn is part of it. As in BOOGIE NIGHTS, however, THE ICE STORM implies that because 70s sex in some manner is excessive and depraved, it demands a price. Within this context, in THE ICE STORM porn simply connotes that sex is everywhere — from the movies, to affairs, to "key parties," to high school teens and even young teens. Absolutely everyone in that film has sex with or wants to have sex with or tries to have sex with someone they shouldn't because of marital status, age, drunkenness or some combination thereof. 70s sex in this film is represented as totally devoid of anything useful, erotic, or even human. Its one characteristic seems to be that it is everywhere. And here the reference to porno chic derives its significance. Empty, inhuman, depraved, pervasive sexuality is synonymous with the film's and much of our society's conception of porn. While never suggesting that porn causes social problems, THE ICE STORM does suggest that porn epitomizes this era's decadent sexuality. And as in BOOGIE NIGHTS, decadent sexuality has to be paid for. If parents weren't out watching porn, having casual affairs and attending key parties, young teens wouldn't be having drunken sex and wandering around alone getting electrocuted in ice storms.

Both THE ICE STORM and BOOGIE NIGHTS link 70s sexuality to near-catastrophic doom. And because THE ICE STORM reduces porn to a simple dimension, that film has a significantly different reference to porn than does BOOGIE NIGHTS. THE ICE STORM really is about 70s sexuality and not about porn. Although its sole reference to porn is from my perspective significant, that reference comes at a minor moment at the edge of a film with other things on its mind. BOOGIE NIGHTS, on the other hand, places its representation of porn and

the porn industry at its center and attempts to make porn emblematic of a decade, or, more precisely, as we shall see two decades.

And what exactly is BOOGIE NIGHTS' representation of porn? John Leland begins a *Newsweek* article on the return of the 70s "rogue male" as follows:

"Early in the film BOOGIE NIGHTS, the character of Dirk Diggler gets his break in the dirty-movie business. Dirk, played by Mark Wahlberg, is an aspiring porn actor, and his debut is epic: a jaw-dropping, buckle-swashing marathon-sex scene that leaves even the jaded veterans on the set agape" (72).

In actuality, as presented in BOOGIE NIGHTS, Diggler's debut porn-acting scene is tame by the standards of hardcore porn, not just in terms of the obvious issue of graphic sexuality (to which I shall return) but rather in terms of what Leland calls the "marathon." Hardcore porn sex scenes are indeed commonly represented as "marathons" with the men emerging as sexual athletes — sweating, grunting, grimacing, and most of all pounding and enduring. Diggler does not do anything unusual, and the veterans on the porn production set, like just about every other character in BOOGIE NIGHTS, seem as much if not more in awe of Diggler's 13-inch penis than of his performance. Leland perceptively observes, however, that after shooting the scene, the crew worries about not getting the climactic shot; as they consider using stock footage, Diggler emerges as superhuman when he calmly offers,

"I could do it again if you need a close-up."

This single scene comprises most of the film's representation of actual porn filmmaking. Considering the movie's length, it devotes very little screen time to depicting porn films being made or shown after they are made. Indeed, much of the additional porn film footage found in the narrative shows snippets of non-sex scenes from a James-Bond-type character whom Diggler plays over and over and scenes from a documentary about Diggler made by Amber (Julianne Moore). Not surprisingly several critics have referred to the sex scenes' "discreteness." In a sense, BOOGIE NIGHTS represents porn by not representing its most notorious ingredient.

When Hollywood makes a film about the Titanic, spectators expect to see the ship sink. When Hollywood makes a film about porn, spectators don't usually expect to see porn. This partly comes from producers' concerns about ratings issue and partly from their assumption that, regardless of ratings, no Hollywood film audience wants to watch hardcore porn — it is simply too offensive. If in one sense, then, BOOGIE NIGHTS is like THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT because it does not graphically represent offending porn; in another sense, it is quite different. Whereas Milos Forman washed his hands of porn and denied any personal interest in it, BOOGIE NIGHTS' director, Paul Thomas Anderson, has spoken openly about both his love for and interest in 70s porn and his contempt for 80s porn:

"My memories of 1st discovering porno film in my preadolescence and then my stronger memories from adolescence which is the second half of the movie are certainly grounding for any research that I did, and you know, I've just seen a million porno movies and I've read a lot about it.

Sort of a general fascination with it." (Rabinowitz)

Anderson is not embarrassed by nor apologetic for his "fascination" with porn but talks about it as he might any other film genre. He regrets that it is difficult now to find videos of the "classics," such as DEEP THROAT, BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR, JADE PUSSY CAT, and AMANDA BY NIGHT. When asked what he thinks happened to the porn industry, Anderson is also open and direct:

"My take is that video is the real enemy there, I mean certainly drugs were a part of it, and I'm sure there's sort of a bigger society picture, but that's getting into the whole political arena...video is the enemy to me...the moment there was a chance for [the industry] to breath and sort of open up and develop a new genre...it was sort of taken away by video tape." (Rabinowitz)

Comparing video porn to music video, Anderson observes,

"With cuts, and not thinking things through. Where's the plan? Where's the story? Where is any sort of vision to this stuff? It's just missing" (Rabinowitz).

The representation of porn within BOOGIE NIGHTS hardly reveals that Anderson has seen "millions" of porn films; however, the screenplay does delineate his partisanship for 70s, feature length, 35 mm, narrative porn vs. 80s video porn. Near the end of BOOGIE NIGHTS, Jack Homer (Burt Reynolds), a 70s porn auteur, is economically pressured to enter the video porn market. Maintaining his integrity, he initially refuses even to think about it. By the film's climax, however, we see Homer making an amateur-style video porn. As he drives around with one of his porn starlets, with camera running, he picks a stranger up off the street. The young man recognizes the starlet as someone he went to high school with, and the scene soon turns ugly when that man demands against her wishes that she satisfy him sexually. Homer orders the car stopped, throws the young man out and brutally beats him as he lies on the pavement. The film's earlier vision of pros' consensual sex while working within the structured security of a film porn set is later replaced by its ugly vision of uncontrolled, abusive amateur sex, spilling over onto the street.

Both Anderson's remarks and the film's representation of video porn are naive and inadequate. Since for Anderson porn becomes emblematic of a decade, he creates a sharp, dramatic distinction between 70s and 80s porn. The main manner in which he dramatizes this is through Jack Homer's transition from one form of porn production to the other as he goes from being a narrative, theatrical porn director to a back-seat-of-the car amateur porn one. Yet, this plot movement simplifies the history of porn in two ways. Indeed, early video porn often does appear as little more than a cheap imitation of 70s, 35 mm, narrative porn; the videos have weaker stories, no production values, and quick and cheap production processes. But 70s porn directors did not make a transition to video porn in the early 80s as Homer does. In addition, the early, clumsy phase of video porn did not include the development of "pro/am" forms such as the one represented in the film where Jack Homer drives around with a pro, Roller Girl, looking to pick up an amateur. Nor were the innovators of such amateur and pro/am tapes the old, established, 35mm 70s directors forced into a new form.

My point here is not one of realism or historical accuracy. Rather, I want to show how *BOOGIE NIGHTS* needs to distort historically its representation of porn in order to dramatize different styles of porn as characterizing different decades. This is not surprising for a film where the first dramatic sign of paying the price for the 70s occurs at a New Year's Eve party in January, 1980.

The manner in which video porn is represented in the film and discussed by Anderson in interviews is disturbingly simplistic. It inadequately posits video as the "enemy" and ruin of a Golden Era of porn (a discourse to which several actual porn performers and directors have themselves contributed). Film styles and markets result from massive economic, social, and cultural forces, which are complex and defy reduction to an "enemy." The demise of 70s theatrical porn was as inevitable as the 60s demise of the old Hollywood studio system or the 90s demise of the European art cinema. During the 80s, videotape, VCR saturation of the home market, and rise of video rental stores all doomed theatrical porn. The reason is clear. Why should people go out to despised, public places to watch porn when they can do so in the privacy of their home? The sexual/masturbatory nature of porn obviously makes privacy desirable. Viewers don't risk being seen by others if they watching porn at home or being exposed to what they might perceive as an undesirable element (e.g., men masturbating) in porn theaters.

BOOGIE NIGHTS does not represent this aspect of porn exhibition: it neither represents the theatrical environment for Jack Homer's features nor the home environment for new video porn. The film simply elides this aspect of porn, preferring to represent porn being made or porn being projected on screens isolated from any actual viewing environment. But Anderson clearly incorporates into the storyline his view of video as the enemy. At the 1980 New Year's Eve party, a businessman-producer tells Homer about the new video market and pressures him to enter it. Homer responds to this crass commercialism by articulating his porn auteur aesthetic, declaring that he will not degrade his vision. Later, when he has sold out to the new form, it and he are then both represented as equally degraded.

In reality, video porn is much more than the "enemy" of a romanticized notion of theatrical film porn. Indeed, such video porn auteurs as Ed Powers who came to prominence in the 90s have had as creative, accomplished careers as the Mitchell Brothers, Alex De Renzy, Henry Paris or any of the theatrical porn auteurs in the 70s. Powers and others have not just made cheaper copies of narrative theatrical porn with lower production values; they have innovated entire new forms more closely linked to documentary than fictional narrative traditions. In such series as *MORE DIRTY DEBUTANTES* and *DEEP INSIDE DIRTY DEBUTANTES*, Powers has brought entirely new erotic elements into play via the interview technique. Ironically, the lengthy interviews Powers frequently conducts with women he is about to have sex with places much more emphasis on dialogue than did 70s theatrical porn, in the process contributing a psychological erotic dimension totally absent from earlier porn film narratives. My point is not that these porn video interviews are "real" or "true," but rather that they document some psychological interaction between the participants. The women (some of whom admit it on camera) may not be using their own names, may have a history of working in the adult entertainment industry as dancers, and may even have agents and be starting porn careers. Nevertheless, something about them as actual people is documented.

Similarly, Powers even has constructed a comic Woody-Allen-type Jewish persona for himself, acknowledging insecurities such as worrying about his penis size. In *MORE DIRTY DEBUTANTES* #72 (1997), for example, he tells one of the women he is about to have sex with that his penis is "only" five and a half inches long and asks if that "scares" her.

Furthermore, Powers and other amateur video porn makers have broken the oppressive domination in porn of limited body types. At a time when nearly all porn stars in narrative porn had silicon breast enlargements, nearly all the women in Powers' tapes do not. Women with small and average size breasts are common in Powers' tapes. Powers also features women of color and diverse ethnic backgrounds much more than was the case in the 70s.

Stylistically, Powers frequently is innovative with handheld video cameras and employing minors and monitors as stylistic devices which, among other things, reveal the production process and apparatus. Similarly he brings attention to the camera; sometimes he holds it himself while engaging in sexual activity and other times he puts it on a tripod and re-enters the scene. Some of his sequences are shot entirely by himself so that his sexual partner is the only other participant in the taping. Other times, he uses a camera to reveal the cameraperson who has been shooting the footage, and then we see the sexual partners again through that person's camera. Still other times, Powers surprisingly reveals the presence of others on the set. All of the above listed techniques can be found in *DEEP INSIDE DIRTY DEBUTANTES* #2 (1993) and #14 (1997) and *MORE DIRTY DEBUTANTES* #72.

Perhaps most important, Powers displaces a monotonous emphasis on the meat shot that had so come to characterize theatrical and video narrative porn. He also eliminates the ever-present generic music audio track intermingled with dubbed moans. Most of Powers' work involves live, unadorned soundtracks, which include actual dialogue with the participants and the sounds (and silences) of their sex. Although I believe the work of video porn makers such as Powers deserves the kind of analysis Linda Williams brings to 70s theatrical porn, my point in discussing Powers' style here is simply to show the inadequacy of viewing someone like him as a degraded version of someone like the character Jack Homer. Yet, that is precisely Anderson's vision, both in his interviews and in *BOOGIE NIGHTS*.

I have saved for last perhaps the most obvious way in which *BOOGIE NIGHTS* represents porn — the legendary size of its main character's penis and what Mark Rabinowitz calls the "notorious dick shot" (*indieWIRE*, 10/31/97). Anderson himself has remarked in regards to the film's 157 minute running time and the concluding penis shot,

"You're paying more, you should get more...I wasn't going to subject you to 157 minutes without showing it to you" (*indieWIRE* 10/31/97).

Anderson's sense of humor notwithstanding, his comment (which apparently answers a question about why he showed Diggler's penis) deflects attention away from more important questions: Why is this film so preoccupied with Diggler's much discussed, gawked at, and finally revealed 13" penis? Indeed, why is this film, which is seemingly about the porn industry and the 70s, so centered on its main character's genital endowment, so much so that Anderson can even joke about the

need to show it after 157 minutes? The answer, I suggest, has more to do with the 90s than either the 70s or 80s.

A large penis is, in fact, an important part of porn during the 70s and has remained so even in video porn. In *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*, I have discussed this aspect of porn. Here I would simply note that such porn strives to represent the penis as an awesome spectacle of power. Penis size enters the narratives of some classic porn films such as *DEEP THROAT* (1972) in this way: At the film's conclusion, Linda Lovelace informs a would-be lover that she requires a 9" penis for her sexual satisfaction. The man says he is only 4" away from fulfilling her needs. Both Lovelace and the audience presume that he has a 5" erection only to learn that he is really 13".

Similarly, *INSATIABLE* (1980), titled after Marilyn Chambers' character's sexual appetite, ends with a scene where several men attempt to satisfy her. After they fail, we see a figure emerge from the darkness and, with a spotlight shining directly on the genital area, momentarily stand still. It is the legendary John Holmes, who even when flaccid was extraordinarily large. The assumption underlying this shot is clear — if any man can satisfy the insatiable woman's desires, it is this man. The shot is quite unusual since porn typically does not dwell on the flaccid penis, preferring instead the spectacle of the erection. But Holmes is so large when flaccid that the filmmakers presume that even in such a state, he presents a spectacle of masculine power which the image track can visually emphasize with a spotlight rather than gloss over or elide.

Anderson's characterizing of Diggler's penis as 13-inches long is a direct reference to Holmes (a.k.a. Johnny Wadd), who was widely reputed to have been 13 inches. *BOOGIE NIGHTS* even refers to Holmes by name. Yet, even among the large penises that characterize porn, Holmes was a nearly grotesque exaggeration, as the above described scene in *INSATIABLE* illustrates. So why should *BOOGIE NIGHTS* choose to model its central character upon this aspect of Holmes since Holmes was more of an aberration than a norm within 70s porn? If Anderson wanted to catch the spirit of 70s porn, someone like Jamie Gillis or Harry Reems would have been a better choice. Anderson has unwittingly, it seems to me, caught a central aspect of the 90s rather than the 70s.

In *Running Scared*, I argue that images of men and the male body are caught within a polarity not unlike the mother/whore dichotomy which structures so many representations of women. At one pole, we have the powerful, awesome spectacle of phallic masculinity and at the other its vulnerable, pitiable, and frequently comic collapse. While I still believe that such a polarity functions centrally within current Western representations of the penis, the extreme critical praise and box-office success surrounding David Henry Hwang's play, *M. BUTTERFLY*, and Neil Jordan's film, *THE CRYING GAME* (1992), suggest the emergence of a third category which I call the melodramatic penis (Lehman, 1997b). Neither the phallic spectacle nor its pitiable and/or comic collapse, these representations of the penis are, on the one hand, challenging and, on the other hand, constitute a troubled site of representation which contains disturbing contradictions. The much-publicized 1993 Bobbitt case which centered on a severed and reattached penis may be part of this melodramatic penis discourse. Indeed, John Wayne Bobbitt's penis may well be the ultimate melodramatic penis:

first it is severed, then it is lost, then it is found, then it is miraculously reattached, then it becomes a star in porn films, and then it is enlarged!

In *THE CRYING GAME* the revelation that one of the characters who appears to be a woman is a man is accompanied by a shot of the unexpected penis. This image is followed, in short order, by the shocked male lover hitting her, vomiting, and then rushing from the apartment, leaving "her" lying on the floor in a pose reminiscent of Lillian Gish on the ice in *WAY DOWN EAST*. In a flashback sequence in *COBB* (1994), the audience is shocked to discover that the legendary baseball great's father was shot to death by his wife's naked lover when he intruded upon their affair. The audiences' shock at the sight of the naked man is heightened by the fact that an earlier "lying flashback" had given a different account of the event, one in which there was no man present. In *ANGELS AND INSECTS* (1995), a husband discovers that his wife is having an incestuous affair with her brother. At the moment that the husband bursts in on her, the brother leaps from their lovemaking and stands fully nude. Lovemaking that reveals transvestitism; adultery and murder; incest — it is hard to imagine more melodramatic contexts than these. Penises, it seems, must elicit an extremely strong response from us. If awe or laughter do not define the full range of such responses, melodrama is standing by.

The "notorious dick" shot in *BOOGIE NIGHTS* can best be understood within this context. From the press coverage surrounding the Bobbitt case to the above-mentioned films and others such as *CARRIED AWAY* (1996) and *KISSED* (1996), the 90s are characterized by a new assault on the final taboo of sexually representing the penis. A need to talk about and show the penis is everywhere. In this regard, Anderson's dwelling on it throughout the film and showing it in the last shot can best be understood as indicating the time in which his film is made rather than the time period the film's story represents. For in 1975 or even 1985, a Hollywood film that spoke of its central character's penis would hardly end with a graphic shot of it.

On the surface, it might seem that the final shot of a penis in *BOOGIE NIGHTS* falls not into the melodramatic category but rather that of awesome spectacle of phallic power. But within the context of a Hollywood narrative, the shot is also melodramatic — a sort of hybrid of the two categories. After soliloquizing in front of a mirror while waiting to shoot a porn scene, Diggler gets up, approaches the camera, and in a frontal close up unzips his pants and pulls out his penis. And what a penis it is. It is even larger than that of Holmes at the end of *INSATIABLE*. The shot's effect derives from its "impressive" spectacle. I have argued elsewhere that this kind of emphasis on the large flaccid penis results from a slippage of the erect penis onto the flaccid penis (Lehman, 1993). That is, if we are going to show the flaccid penis, it had better look as much like the supposed awesome spectacle of an erection as possible. Indeed, the flaccid penis in *BOOGIE NIGHTS* seems virtually indistinguishable from the 13-inch erection we have been hearing about. And the brutally frontal, nearly confrontational manner in which the penis is directly revealed for the camera also relates the shot to melodrama's excesses.

Predictably, the press picked up on this aspect of the film's showing a large penis. One review boldly declares in capital letters,

"WARNING; LEAVE BEFORE THE END OF THE FILM IF YOU

DON'T WANT TO SEE IT. Or a prosthetic, or *something* — controversy and conflicting accounts swirl around this startling leap into a new world of fix prosthetics, if that's what the alleged body part in question is" (Downing).

U.S.A. Today observes,

"Mark Wahlberg plays a central character and buries his Marky Mark persona for good, giving emotional validity to a busboy with superstar ambitions and a 13-inch natural endowment."

Jami Bernard's review in the *New York Daily News* begins by declaring, "No, it's not real, it's a prosthesis." At the other extreme, an entire newspaper article, "BOOGIE NIGHTS leaves a big question" by Barry Koltnow, is devoted entirely to discussing the penis shot as ambiguous:

"What everybody wants to know is: Whose sexual organ was used for the final shot in the movie? Wahlberg's face is cleverly hidden so it could easily have been a body double. Some early media reports hint that it is a prosthetic device."

After describing how at various times the stars and director of the film have said everything ranging from claiming it is Wahlberg's penis to Burt Reynolds's penis to a prosthetic device, Koltnow concludes,

"We may never know the real answer to this puzzling mystery. My search for the truth is over. There's nothing else I can do. I'm certainly not going to follow somebody into the men's room to find out. Let it remain a mystery."

After teasing his readers by in effect asking, "Will the real owner of Dirk Diggler's penis please stand up?", Koltnow concludes we will never know who or what it really is. All of this extra-textual attention to the real owner of the penis, if in fact it is a real penis, simply intensifies the film's diegetic fascination with Diggler's penis.

Koltnow's article is of particular interest since it not only typifies the press's continuing interest in the 90s to talk about penises but also for the manner in which it indicates the melodramatic nature of the penis shot. Koltnow begins his article by discussing other moments in film history that have "shocked" audiences sexually such as Clark Gable removing his shirt in *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT* and Sharon Stone crossing her legs in *BASIC INSTINCT*. "This time the shocking moment will come in the last few frames," Koltnow notes. It is precisely this element of shock that aligns the last shot of *BOOGIE NIGHTS* with the melodramatic shocks of transvestitism, adultery, murder, and incest described above. In their own way, the shock effect of the representations of the penis in these films ensures that even in the 90s a penis cannot be just a penis. Even as our culture tries to assault the final taboo of the penis, it continues to reinforce the awe and the mystique of the phallus by insisting that the sight of the penis has extraordinary power.

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Star Trek Insiders and "outcasts"

by Elspeth kydd

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"INFINITE DIVERSITY IN INFINITE COMBINATION"

Gordene Olga MacKenzie's exploration of media and popular culture representations of transgender people focuses on the preponderance of talk show, tabloid-style exposés of transgenderism.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] These shows predicate their audience appeal on claims of realism, social commentary or personal interest news value. Clearly such shows have problematic, often pathologizing and, of course, patronizing attitudes toward transgender issues.

Yet elsewhere in mainstream television discourse, images of and debates over transgenderism also surface. One show in which the boundaries of socially accepted and proscribed gender behavior are challenged and questioned, even if only to ultimately be reaffirmed, is STAR TREK. This show's science fiction discourse often sets itself up to explore social boundaries through the projected fantasy of a futuristic narrative. Within that framework, it deals with issues of gender.

In this article I will explore one specific episode, "The Outcast," to trace how STAR TREK invokes complex transgendered desires and how those desires become permitted through science fiction displacement onto an alien species. I find this displacement interesting in comparison to STAR TREK's other racial and cultural metaphors, metaphors that repeatedly feature an alien species embodying contemporary issues of difference.

STAR TREK producers claim that their decision to create the episode "The Outcast" was to a response to activism and fan-letter writing to create a character or situation within the STAR TREK world that would appeal to gay and lesbian fans.[2] From this perspective the show in general is certainly open to much criticism. Although this specific episode deploys the rhetoric gay and lesbian activism, the narrative situation displaces these issues onto a heterosexual context. It therefore explores moral dilemmas inherent in transgendered situations without seeming to support anything but normalized heterosexuality. Yet despite its ultimately conservative resolution, this episode is an early example from one of a few primetime television dramatic series which raise transgendered issues in a

context where bipolar gender is apparently under scrutiny.

MALE AND FEMALE: " UNIVERSAL CONSTANTS"

In "Metamorphosis," an episode from the original STAR TREK series, members of the Enterprise crew encounter an alien lifeform. This visual manifestation of 1960s television special effects is seen as a blob of multicolored light, "a being of pure electricity." The lifeform, known as "The Companion," has developed a relationship with a stranded human, Zefram Cochrane. Cochrane and the Companion communicate telepathically; while he stands erect, the Companion's light engulfs him. When the Enterprise crew arrive, they connect the Companion to a "universal translator," which gives it a voice, a female voice. After this first gendered communication, an interesting scene ensues. When Cochrane asks Kirk why the Companion's voice is female, Kirk replies,

"The ideas of male and female are universal constants."[3]

In the conversation that follows, Cochrane manifests distaste about the now-sexualized relationship in which he has unknowingly participated.

The knowledge of the Companion's femininity sexualizes its relationship with Cochrane. Cochrane's reaction to his newly discovered sexual liaison is one of aversion. This indicates both his fear of inter-species sex as well as his reticence at being the receptive partner of the "sexual" act:

"For all these years I've let something as alien as that crawl around inside me."[4]

When the Companion is discovered to be female, its relationship with a man is confirmed as sexual and its actions motivated by desire. The universal translator mediates this discovery as a technological device which aids the federation's exploratory and ultimately colonial endeavors on "the final frontier."

Yet what is it that gives gender to an undifferentiated blob of light? After Kirk, Speck and McCoy discover the Companion's femininity through intervention by their technology, the Companion then begins to display stereotypically gendered behavior. Spock describes its interactions with Cochrane as follows:

"Her appearance is soft, gentle, her voice is melodic, pleasing."

Undoubtedly the Companion, with no physical markers of human biological sex, performs her gendered identity. STAR TREK, however, does not differentiate between the role of biological sexual difference and performed gendered identities. After all, acting feminine, which includes the Companion's impulsive (and dare I say hysterical) behavior, is being female. Furthermore, the Companion's femininity is assured, within this heterosexual framework, through her desire for a man.

This scene from "Metamorphosis" engages several of STAR TREK's recurring themes, themes that cross from the 1960s series through to the most recent spinoff, VOYAGER. These themes include the relations between humans and other species, the intervention of technology in developing interspecies communication, and the normalization of gender roles. The scene also invokes STAR TREK's structuring concern with evolution towards "utopia." Thus, Kirk, Spock and McCoy do not have

the prejudices against interspecies relationships that Cochrane espouses as the product of another generation. As Speck expresses it, Cochrane's prejudice shows "a totally parochial attitude."

The more recent STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION episode, "The Outcast," also deals with gender issues in the framework of racial/species displacement. It also has at its core a relationship between a human and a member of another species. In this episode, however, the universality of the "idea of male and female" is apparently called into question. The Enterprise crew work alongside the J'naii, a "species without gender." When one of the J'naii, Soren, develops an attraction and subsequent relationship with Commander Riker, a conflict occurs within J' naii society over her decision to assume a female gender. A similar principal to that in "Metamorphosis" shapes this episode's narrative line. In this case, Soren's desire for Riker (a human male) confirms her gender as female, similar to the way that marking the Companion's female gender reveals her desire for Cochrane (human male). Yet in both episodes the relation between gender and desire, even the conflation of gender with desire, points to instabilities in the complex formation and embodiment of futuristic gendered identities.

"JUST PEOPLE INSTEAD OF WOMEN"

The original STAR TREK series presents gendered discourse through absolute bipolar gendered identification; male and female are universal constructs not only for humans but for any utopian, projected other. I would like to briefly return to another moment from the 1960s STAR TREK to provide a comparative context for the different ways in which futuristic gender construction is (apparently) under scrutiny. In the episode, "The Conscience of the King," Captain Kirk indulges in one of his many romantic encounters. In this seduction scene the woman, Lenore, asks him a bizarre question.

Lenore: "Tell me about the women in your world...Has the machine changed them? Made them just people instead of women?"

Kirk: "Worlds may change, galaxies disintegrate, but a woman always remains a woman." [5]

Lenore's question, framed as an invitation for Kirk's compliment and sexual advances, alerts us to several issues in STAR TREK's imagined gendered future. The question indicates a fear that increasing similarity between genders and an utopian move toward equality will homogenize humanity and destroy gender difference. The question also signals a fear of technology's role in this science fiction construction of gender, a fear that an increasingly advanced technological society will eradicate sexual difference and perhaps by extension sex itself.

Lenore's fear of homogenizing people — losing femininity and the reducing difference — resonates with Constance Penley's discussion of science fiction and gender difference in her essay, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and Critical Dystopia." [6] Science fiction plays on a fear of gender conformity in situations where work, uniform dress (more a case in the later series) and technological changes have created a (utopian) sense of equality. Penley argues that classical film's narrative motion

"is powered by the desire to establish by the end of the film, the nature of masculinity, the nature of femininity, and the way in which those two can be complementary rather than antagonistic." [7]

Penley finds that as science fiction uses relations between humans/ non-humans, organic beings/ cyborgs or time displacement narratives (that establish relations between those from the present or those from the past or future), the genre reinscribes difference. She writes:

"[T]he question of sexual difference -a question whose answer is no longer 'selfevident' — is displaced onto the more remarkable difference between the human and the other." [8]

Within the narrative of "The Other," the J'naii as a species embody concerns about sameness and gender conformity. Since they negate the possibility of difference, they deny the classical narrative trajectory of investigating bipolar genders and that narrative's ultimate heterosexual conclusion. At the same time they offer a heightened sense of racial/ species difference in that eradication of gender.

The character Worf expresses his discomfort with the sameness that the J'naii represent. A scene between Worf, Crusher and Troi serves as a commentary on the growing relationship between Soren and Riker. Worf express discomfort at the J'naii because "they're all alike, no males, no females." Troi replies that "we're probably as strange to them." [9] Crusher then talks about Soren's attraction for Riker, claiming that Soren "seems to be overcoming the differences [between human and J'naii]."

The J'naii within themselves represent a species lacking difference, as Lynne Joyrich describes them:

"All members of this androgynous race...look alike (featureless), speak alike (in a monotone), and dress alike (in shapeless robes)." [10]

This lack of distinctions between the J'naii enhances the viewer's sense of their difference from humans and specifically from the highly masculinized character of Riker. As relations between Riker and the J'naii develop, the plot articulates increased differences. When this interspecies relation inscribes gender onto the previously genderless Soren, the plot compounds displaced racial/cultural difference and heterosexual gender difference.

Penley suggests,

"That this questioning of difference between human and other is sexual in nature can also be seen in the way that these films reactivate infantile sexual investigation." [11]

A fairly lengthy scene by television standards is given over in "The Outcast" to Soren and Riker's discussion of their species' reproductive processes. This fascination with different reproductive and sexual practices teases the audience with the question, "How do aliens do it?" [12] (The question is repeated in "The Nitpickers Guide for Next Generation Trekkers," which feature speculation on the nature of J'naii genitalia. [13]) Although Soren describes J' naii sexual practices to

Riker, the tease remains unresolved and intensified by the different species' conflicting sexual practices. Even if we know a small amount about how J'naii perform their sexual acts, we are left with the question, "How do a J'naii and a human 'do it'?" Such a question in fact was first expressed by Worf —

"a human and a J'naii? Impossible."

Riker and Soren's discussion of their species' sexual practices resonates with other moments in STAR TREK when alien sexuality is explored. In the ongoing STAR TREK narrative, the issue of "how aliens do it" resurfaces. For example, in the original series, the episode "Amok Time" explored the Vulcan experience of "Pon Farr" — a biological and animalistic projection of sexual practice.[14] A recent VOYAGER episode "Blood Fever" returned to this motif. In both these instances a male Vulcan character feels an uncontrollable biological urge to "mate." [15] This situation plays on the irony of a species so controlled and unemotional becoming overpowered by emotional sexual drives. Yet the sense of mystique and exoticism around alien sexual rituals provides narrative tension and interest in finding out about another group's sexuality.

STAR TREK's recurring theme of alien mating practices is one of the few places where the series examines sexuality. Despite the radical potential of using non-gendered characters, STAR TREK regularly introduces sexuality within the framework of reproduction and the conventions of romantic love. Plotlines conflate sexuality with reproduction to confirm heterosexuality's already centralized position in the series. Thus, in "The Outcast" the intersection of reproductive sex and romantic love mark how the script will deal with a "transgendered" character and its interspecies relationships.

The episode resolves unsatisfactorily; the J'naii treat Soren with "psycho-techic therapy" to "cure" her of aberrant gender. This resolution terminates any romantic possibilities between Riker and Soren. Yet the resolution also is a function of how serial television narrative usually treats sexuality. Television series' formal constraints often deny the possibility of romantic involvement for ongoing characters. A relationship with a regular member of a STAR TREK crew almost automatically fails. This narrative does not resolve itself in the filmic sense, as Penley discusses, because the television series structurally disallows romance as a narrative conclusion.

Ultimately, as Joyrich suggests, part of the central discourse on difference in "The Outcast"

"presumes that all androgynous or transgendered people are absolutely the same, that without the excitement of sexual difference, there is clearly no difference at all." [16]

One of the many displacements at work in this episode is to displace onto an alien species any potential discussion of transgendered humans or questioning of the problems inherent in bipolar gendered humanity. It presents heterosexuality and unproblematic male/ female gender identification as the norm for humanity, as well as a desirable goal for non-humans.

"A TOTALLY PAROCHIAL ATTITUDE"

Much critical writing on STAR TREK focuses on a structuring interest in racial and cultural difference coded into the premise of a starship exploring unknown territory.[17] The narrative drive through the many STAR TREK manifestations depends on the complex creation of various species of alien lifeforms. Those species' interaction with humans shapes most storylines. The various series repeatedly return to the issue of interspecies mixing, both sexual and reproductive.

Self-consciously, I would call this representation of interspecies relationships "miscegenation." That is, I wish to signal the parallels between this discourse and the ongoing U.S. interest and taboo around questions of interracial sex and mixed race people.[18] On television these taboos often function in similar ways to transgendered discourse: the taboos are a regular feature of talk shows and a sensationalized tabloid subject.

"Miscegenation" represents another contested site of sexuality on STAR TREK, and one that bears comparison with gender discourse in "The Outcast": the two strands of sexual discourse are ultimately interconnected. The scripts represent such an interest in "miscegenation" in terms of interspecies romances but more prominently through mixed species characters. The original STAR TREK series initiated an interest in mixed people with the character of Spock, whose representation articulated discourses of liminality and certain characteristics of a mulatto stereotype. Throughout other manifestations of STAR TREK, other mixed race or mixed culture characters have been incorporated into the diegesis. In THE NEXT GENERATION Counselor Troi is half human, half betazoid, and Worf is a Klingon raised by humans.[19] VOYAGER produces the latest manifestation of the interspecies character with the half human/ half Klingon B' Elanna Torres, whose mixed species status provides the foundation for repeated narrative conflict.

These characters maintain the series' ongoing narrative of interspecies desire and interspecies reproduction. "Miscegenetic" relations occur on various levels. In specific episodes, guest characters serve as temporary romantic involvement for ongoing characters. Difference is central to these relations and results in the plots' exploring otherness. Yet the serial nature of narrative means that often these relations provide one time experiences, not ongoing concerns. If interspecies relationships develop over the length of several episodes, in varying ways, they are marked as unstable. On the whole, despite the number of mixed species characters on STAR TREK, interspecies sexuality remains disallowed.[20]

The use of a mixed-species person is a method by which a character embodies the narrative's intercultural exploration. The larger tradition of the mulatto or mixed race character in literature and popular culture is fairly complex in how it articulates cultural difference, sameness and assimilation. In her study of the mixed race character in U.S. literature, Judith Berzon suggests that one manifestation of the "mulatto" is as "existential man." [21]

Certainly Spock fits this characterization of "existential man," a characterization that provides for exploration of differences.

"He...was a complex, multilayered...character whose basic inner turmoil and unalterably alien presence could provide a strong focal point for any number of dramatic possibilities." [22]

This kind of mixed race character is not simply reducible to the stereotype of "tragic mulatto" although it has inherent in it the drama of conflict of identities. Mixed characters also occupy a more complex narrative space whereby their access to two different cultures often makes them figures of mediation between their two worlds.[23] This mediating function also allows them to serve as potential figures of assimilation and appropriation.

When examined in the context of an interest in interspecies mixing, the character of Soren and "her" relationship to Commander Riker follows certain conventions. Soren's characterization follows the narrative practice of embodying conflicts of cultural identity through a character's personal crisis. Her choice of a gender, as well as her desire for a human, alienates her from the J'naii and brings her closer to being human, making her a figure of liminality between the two cultures. As a liminal or "border" figure, her existence within the series' discourse on sexuality can be used critically to explore the nature of gendered performance and gender construction. I see this as similar way to the use of the mixed culture character in the examples discussed above.

Additionally, Soren's desire for Riker transgresses species boundaries as well as breaks with the J'naii's (non)gender expectations. The J'naii's treatment of her could be read as punishment for miscegenation as well as for gender transgression. Also at work here is a narrative of progression and evolution towards a racial/species utopia, mentioned earlier in relation to Cochrane and the Companion. Like Cochrane the J'naii have a "totally parochial attitude" towards inter-species mixing.

The area in which racial and gender transgression find a close relation is the problematic, yet interesting, notion of "passing." This idea evokes complexities of identity and concealment as well as other questions about the essentializing tendencies of racial and gendered discourse. The issue of passing also raises a series of questions about the way in which identities — of gender and of race — ultimately rely on performance.

In "It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest," Amy Robinson discusses the role of passing as a performative act. She identifies the moment of the pass as "a triangular theater of identity." In the act of passing, the performance is initiated by the performer and witnessed by both the "dupe" and the "in-group clairvoyant." [24] The moment of the pass occurs both racially and in terms of gender or sexuality. It can be more usefully seen in terms of performance rather than more conventional models of concealment or hiding a pre-given, essentialized identity.

In "The Outcast" the characterization of the J'naii as a species is tied to passing since their performance of no-gender functions to highlight the nature of gender. The J'naii lead the audience to speculate on what constitutes what we perceive as gendered identity. Visually the episode removes stereotypical markers of gender so that Soren explores the nature of gender by discussing Riker's beard and Crusher's make up and hairstyle. The episode follows Soren's narrative with little sympathy for the other J'naii characters, giving the impression that underlying their performance of no-gender is a group of people passing, concealing or repressing their true gendered natures.

Narratives of passing have another significant moment: the scene of confessing the pass. In racial passing narratives, often the passer confesses to a lover or potential lover "the real" nature of his/her identity. "The Outcast" also contains scenes of confession. In these, Soren's admission of gendered identification resonates with the passing narrative's scene of revelation. Thus, while Riker and Soren are working together on their shuttlecraft, Soren confesses her desire for him. She also tells him of her gender identification. The scene is structured as a confession; she admits her role as a passer and her past as a closeted female J'naii.

This is also the moment where the rhetoric of gay/lesbian activism is strongest. Not only does this scene gain the audience's sympathies for Soren, the victim of a J'naii style of oppression (that seems particularly "human" and contemporary), it disallows any sympathy for J'naii for the way they have forced Soren to live.

Projecting a fantasy of the J'naii's fear of miscegenation and of gender transgression displaces the contemporary culture's own anxieties around both of those issues. STAR TREK has a preponderance of mixed species characters without comparable representations of the mixed species romances that produce these offspring. In this way, STAR TREK continues a practice of taboo that at once negates miscegenation at the same time as it is endlessly fascinated by it. This episode also displaces fears of transgender issues onto the J'naii in a manner that reinstates bipolar gender. With the J'naii's punishment of Soren for gender transgression, the J'naii are in effect themselves narratively punished for their own deviance from the norm of contemporary conventions of human gender.

"HAS THE MACHINE CHANGED THEM?"

The narrative of "The Outcast" assumes that desire for others constitutes a foundation for a gendered identity. It offers in simplistic terms heterosexual desire normalized through gender: to desire a man is to be a woman. This way, gender is not only constructed performatively but through the matrix of expectations about heterosexual desire. This plot line adds a rich irony to the episode's deployment of ideas from gay/lesbian activism. Soren pleads for the right to partake in heterosexuality in terms of freedom from oppression that remind us of much contemporary lesbian/gay discourse. Watching "The Outcast," however, a gay or lesbian viewer may be left with questions about how the show's formulation of gender intersects with heterosexual expectations. One contradiction or question that the episode raises for me is, "What does it mean to desire gender?" And how is this desire for gender sexualized in relation to the desire for others?

While I am left with questions, I would also like to return to the question posed to the hyper-masculinized character of Captain Kirk: "Has the machine changed them?" As with many STAR TREK episodes, the question of difference between the alien (J'naii) and the human characters is articulated through an intersecting discourse of evolution. If the J'naii have progressed beyond the limitations of gender, they have done so by sacrificing their ability to indulge in interspecies relationships and therefore stepped back on the evolutionary ladder to be at the same point as Cochrane and his fears about his sexual relationship with the Companion. However, Soren claims that the J'naii have evolved beyond the primitive practices of bipolar gender. The nature of this evolution is not specified, but resonates with the series' earlier fear of technological intervention, in which the machine

"has made them people instead of women."

The episode's script constantly ties questions of culture and environment to essentializing references to biology and biological difference. Perhaps a technology that allows for gender reassignment surgery is the ultimate cause of the fear about eradicating difference in "The Outcast." Maybe the J'naii's "misguided" evolution towards a gender-free utopia is this episode's ultimate source of conflict. If the "The Outcast" allows a space in mainstream television to question gender, what it disallows is a chance to celebrate multiple genders or move beyond normalizing bipolar gender identification. It could have allowed narrative space to speculate on the potential "utopia" of a gender-free society, as many feminist science fiction models offer.[25] STAR TREK condemns this potential post-gender fantasy as an evolutionary mistake-as if political correctness has gone wild and not only targeted gendered language but conventional bipolar gender itself. Would that we were so lucky.

NOTES

1. Gordene Olga MacKenzie, *Transgender Nation* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994).
2. Phil Farrand, *The Nitpicker's Guide for Next Generation Trekkers* (New York: Dell Books, 1994).
3. STAR TREK (Paramount, 1968).
4. STAR TREK (Paramount, 1968). It is difficult to imagine that Cochrane assumed a gender for the Companion at all. If the Companion is male would this statement contain homoerotic overtones? Or is the Companion, in Cochrane's view, ungendered?
5. STAR TREK (Paramount, 1967).
6. Constance Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and Critical Dystopia," *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, and Psycho-analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 121-140.
7. Penley, 131.
8. Penley, 132.
9. STAR TREK (Paramount, 1994).
10. Lynne Joyrich, "Feminist Enterprise? STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION and the Occupation of Femininity," *Cinema Journal* 35:2 (1996).
11. Penley, 132.
12. Penley, 131.
13. Farrand, 187.

14. "Amok Time" and "Blood Fever." For an interesting discussion of the some audience interpretations of the Vulcan "Pon Farr," see Constance Penley, "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics and Technology," *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 135-161.
15. Penley argues that there are interesting parallels between "Pon Farr" and PMS. Penley, "Brownian Motion," 140.
16. Joyrich, 64.
17. For example, Taylor Harrison, Sarah Projansky, Kent A. Ono and Elyce Rae Helford, *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on STAR TREK* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.)
18. See Rhonda V. Wilcox, "Dating Data: Miscegenation in STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION," Harrison et al., 69-94.
19. See Leah R. Vande Berg, "Liminality: Worf as Metonymic Signifier of Racial, Cultural and National Differences," Harrison et al., 51-68.
20. There are of course exception to this — Kes and Neelix in VOYAGER and Worf and Dax in DEEP SPACE NINE. Interestingly these relationships are generally between two nonhuman races, rather than between human and other.
21. Judith R. Berzon, *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1978).
22. Quoted in Freda Scott Giles, "From Melodrama to the Movies," *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield: 1995) 63-78.
23. Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
24. Amy Robinson, "It Takes One To Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest," *Critical Inquiry* 20:4 (1994).
25. For example, Ursula LeGuin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1969).

Reproductive technologies and public culture

by Amy Beer

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Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life by Valerie Hartouni (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

"In the traditions of "Western" science and politics — the tradition of racist, male-dominated capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as a resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other — the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination." — Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto." [1] [[open notes in new window](#)]

In the spring of 1997, the "border war," as Haraway characterizes it, between humans and technology erupted when a Scottish embryologist announced that he had successfully cloned a sheep named Dolly. Following this announcement, politicians, policy makers, the media and the public wrangled with the possible implications of sheep cloning for eventual human cloning. Predictions of biological nightmares included the creation of a race of discardable people, à la *Brave New World*; the use of cloning by parents to replace a dying child to avoid grief; and the selection of certain desirable traits to design unnaturally intelligent, or beautiful, or athletically gifted children.[2] In response to the uproar, President Bill Clinton banned the use of federal funds for human cloning, and he charged the newly-appointed National Bioethics Advisory Commission to prepare a report on the potential legal and ethical issues of human cloning. This Commission concluded that strict legislation should be enacted prohibiting the use of cloning to attempt to create a child.[3]

Until Dolly's birth, and particularly since the 1994 congressional elections, recent U.S. debates about human reproduction have centered on regulating traditional technologies such as abortion. In 1995, for example, Congress considered for the first time the "Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act," designed to prohibit abortions in the third trimester of pregnancy. Both houses passed the law, notwithstanding testimony affirming that late abortions are performed only after doctors determine

that a fetus is unviable or that the mother's life is in danger. One woman told of undergoing an abortion after she learned that the brain of her fetus was forming entirely outside its skull. For her bravery in opposing the legislation, a committee member accused her of "not living in the real world" and of representing "part of the radical fringe." Other committee members referred to the woman's doctor as a "hired assassin" and to another woman opposing the law as an "exterminator." [4]

Clinton vetoed the 1995 law, but the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act was reintroduced in March of 1997, and both houses again have passed the bill. Most recently, in September of 1997, the Senate passed a new version of the "Hyde Amendment," a law that prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion except in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment. By requiring states to keep separate records for federal and state funds, the new law is designed to inhibit use of state funds for abortions that fall outside the federal guidelines.

Renewed legislative assault on abortion and our long history of cultural strife over the terms and rights of sexual reproduction make Valerie Hartouni's *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life* timely and compelling. Feminist writings on the cultural significance of reproductive technologies often characterize the "border war" between humans and technology as either a simple struggle by men to control women, or as a celebration of the active historical agency of pregnant women. [5] Moving beyond these reductions, Hartouni offers a sophisticated interpretation of the stakes of historic and contemporary battles over the science and technology of reproduction.

Through close scrutiny of legislative hearings, legal decisions, scientific history, media representations and right-wing scholarly literature, Hartouni considers recent public controversies over reproductive technology and freedoms, showing how social institutions construct and maintain an ideology of the "natural" to manage social disturbances. Rather than seeing the media as a primary source of representations, Hartouni instead looks at how the media uses representational and discursive strategies developed by science and medicine to reflect and reproduce public discourse on biology and technology. Hartouni's reading of S'ALINE'S SOLUTION (Aline Mare, 1991), a video about the artist's struggle to come to terms with an abortion, for example, examines Mare's attempt to rehabilitate the choice of abortion by juxtaposing pro-life strategies with scientific representations. However, instead of rehabilitating abortion, Hartouni concludes, S'ALINE'S SOLUTION uses images in a way that reiterates a public understanding of abortion as a grievous and unnatural choice that opposes the interests of an innocent and autonomous fetus to those of the maternal body.

In her opening chapters, Hartouni looks at how new visions of the fetus result in a changed public understanding of "motherhood" and other family relations. Technological advances in ways of seeing the fetus changed first the way scientists described the fetus. Before the development of ultrasound imaging, for example, scientists imagined the fetus as a kind of parasite, dependent on the maternal host. As ultrasound enabled contemporary scientists to see the gestating fetus, they began to liken fetal activities to the playful romping of a toddler. This new scientific vision which came from ultrasound led to a reconsideration of the fetal/ maternal relation, so that the fetus came to be considered as an autonomous being with legal standing and rights independent of those of the maternal body.

New scientific visions of the fetus first surfaced politically in the 1981 Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on fetal life status, when testimony equated "children" to "post-natal fetuses." For Hartouni, these hearings precipitated public casting of abortion as the cancer at the core of U.S. culture. Infused with "scientific truth," discussions about reproductive technologies increasingly pitted the interests of an autonomous and interest-driven fetus against a maternal body, whose role appeared as biological rather than social. In the early 1980's, beginning with Ronald Reagan's presidency, public preoccupation with abortion mirrored increased preoccupation with women as a category. Portrayals of women and motherhood emphasized women's "natural" roles and drives, and everything from widespread unemployment to an "epidemic" of infertility was blamed on women's choice of the "unnatural" lifestyle of work outside the home.

The media, courts and policy makers affirmed this rhetoric, using the language of science to describe women's nature as a core collection of maternal drives activated by gestation. Abortion, instead of being seen as a technology that facilitated the exercise of women's rights to choose whether or not to become mothers, was cast as a means to undermine the very nature of woman. By presenting women with a legal means to reject their natural role, abortion appeared to threaten social unity and coherence by upsetting traditional gender relations.

Hartouni's reading of *S'ALINE'S SOLUTION* and her interpretation of viewers' responses to the video illuminate changed perceptions of the fetus and maternity over the last several decades. According to Hartouni, the video claims to be pro-choice. By using visual and rhetorical strategies of anti-abortion activism that represent the fetus as a free-floating, autonomous form, however, the video reinforces rather than destabilizes abortion as contradictory to "natural" desires and processes. Like *THE SILENT SCREAM* (1984), produced by the National Right to Life Committee, *S'ALINE'S SOLUTION* begins inside the body, appearing to depict a medical event. Unlike *THE SILENT SCREAM*, however, Mare tries to emphasize female agency by shifting between internal and external images and by juxtaposing images with sound, narration and written text to denaturalize bodily processes.

As Hartouni describes it, the three segments of the video represent a process of coming to terms with an abortion. In the first segment, Mare depicts moments of decision, alternating images of a woman's wet and distorted face behind glass with discrete moments in the reproductive cycle and with representations of choice reconfigured by reversals of images. A running text describes the medical procedure, imparting an aura of scientific veracity to the images. These images are counterpointed by a soundtrack of heavy bass drone that Hartouni interprets as implying suspense and foreboding. In the second segment, which depicts the abortion, Mare's organization of internal body images, the rapid pace of editing, and the images' "curiously alien character," Hartouni writes, foster a sense of unnaturalness and danger. This sense is heightened by the written text's references to violent contractions and to "salt destroyer" as the final step of the medical process and by the increased intensity of the bass drone, finally overcome by mournful groans.

At the end of this segment, Mare juxtaposes internal images of the body with

sounds of a child's laughter and an image of the floating body of an eighteen-week old fetus, intact, as a voice says, "Sh, baby, baby, sh." In the third segment, images of a fetus (appropriated from a PBS childbirth series) alternate with images of the woman behind glass and images of sperm clustering around an ovum. The narrator's voice banters with a child and then speaks words of regret. In the final sequence of images, a baby emerges into gloved hands. Mare then reverses this image, apparently showing the body drawing the fetus/child back into itself, and then shows a woman writhing in pain, as the narrator's voice says,

"My body, my choice...my childlessness."

Hartouni explains that what appear to be images of the medical process of a saline abortion are in fact images of male ejaculation. Viewers have interpreted the video, however, as depicting the confusion, remorse, guilt and despair caused by medical disruption of "natural" biological processes through abortion.[6] Rather than rehabilitating choice, the video produces and reproduces cultural assumptions and depictions of abortion as an unnatural act of violence against an autonomous, free-floating fetus. The representation centers on a misconstrual of the fetus as the thing it represents — a baby — thus presenting pregnancies as naturally disconnected from women's bodies. This leads to abortion's portrayal as a matter that implicates fetal, rather than women's, rights. To refocus cultural debates over abortion, Hartouni writes, the fetus must be resituated within the female body, and the female body resituated in social relations. Without this reconfiguration of the relation between the maternal body and the fetal body, discussions of abortion will continue to tend to position women who choose abortion as rejecting a "natural," biological role rather than as exercising a legitimate social choice about reproduction.

Because of her discussion of public culture, it is surprising that Hartouni did not analyze one of the feature films or television documentaries she only mentions. As an independent video presented to a limited audience, *S'ALINE'S SOLUTION* seems not to be the most compelling example of how cultural conceptions of abortion are produced and reproduced in public culture through media representations. Aside from Hartouni's own suggestions, two recent films in particular portray abortion as contrary to natural roles for women. In *IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK* (1996), a made-for-HBO movie, abortion is presented as an inherently destructive option through the violent punishment of two of the three women who consider abortion a legitimate choice. One bleeds to death after an illegal abortion, and the other woman, a doctor who performs abortions, is fatally shot.

The dramatic feature *CITIZEN RUTH* (Alexander Payne, 1997) shows abortion as a conflict between extremist forces. Ruth, the main character, is an alcoholic, glue-sniffing, homeless, unstable thief who cannot care for her existing children. When she becomes pregnant, a religious, "right-to-life" group and a pro-choice faction struggle over her body. The film's pro-choice faction wants Ruth to abort as a political act, and the "right-to-life" faction opposes Ruth's abortion out of a religious faith that the film portrays as preposterous and extreme. For Ruth herself, abortion is first a means to escape from jail, and then a commercial venture, as the political and religious factions vie to increase her reward for doing what each wants. In the end, Ruth has a miscarriage, as does the third character in *IF THESE*

WALLS COULD TALK. These acts of fate obviate any decision, underlining the maternal body's lack of agency in choices about reproduction, and affirming the practice of abortion as fundamentally opposed to "natural" female functions.

From her discussion of abortion, Hartouni turns to disputes about surrogate parenting, demonstrating how assumptions about natural roles underlie these debates as well. Surrogacy, once feared as unnatural, even monstrous, is now widely accepted, but Hartouni sees this acceptance as rooted in perceptions of maternity as a core drive that must be facilitated by whatever means possible. In legal disputes over the parental rights of surrogate mothers, however, a constellation of conceptions of natural social roles conflict. Surrogacy cases not only pit women with claims to maternity against each other but also involve claims to paternity. Also, assumptions about class and race often complicate these disputes.

In both the cases Hartouni analyzes, the courts chose to reconstruct the legal problem of surrogacy rather than to destabilize conventional understandings of gender, class and racial roles. In the "Baby M" case, the first legal battle over surrogacy, consistent with the rhetoric of the Reagan years, the trial judge construed infertility as a novel phenomenon caused by delayed childbirth. Nevertheless, instead of making new law, he resolved the issue of parental rights in terms of prevailing legal categories, cultural values and public standards. Weighing Bill Stern's contractual and biological claims against Mary Beth Whitehead's "incidental" claim of maternity, the judge upheld paternal authority and awarded custody exclusively to Stern.

In a brilliant insight into the persistence of history, Hartouni locates the roots of the decision in founding myths of Western culture, as retold by Aeschylus. Like Athena, born of Zeus, she writes,

"Baby M springs from the head of the man-god scientist and thus is as well 'a child as no [woman] could bring forth'" (78).

The New Jersey Supreme Court reversed the trial court's opinion, however, striking down the surrogacy contract and settling the matter as a custody dispute. In this light, the higher court decided, Whitehead was admittedly the "real" mother, and she acted as any "natural" mother would in claiming her child, but the stable, upper class couple of Bill Stern (the "real" father) and Betsy Stern (a pediatrician) could best meet the child's needs and provide her with a proper "family."

Both decisions in the Baby M case used biological facts to support class and male prerogatives, shaped by racial imperatives, to uphold a vision of a "natural" family. In the second surrogacy case Hartouni analyzes, the legal decision also endorsed traditional societal formations, but the issues were reconfigured. Here, biology, through the incursion of genetics, was used to contain racial categorizations. Anna Johnson, a black single mother, contracted with Mark and Crispina Calvert, a childless white man and Filipina woman, to carry Crispina's embryo, fertilized *in vitro* by Mark.

After the birth, Johnson sued for custody, claiming that she bonded with the child in the late months of pregnancy and that the Calverts had breached their contract. Hartouni sees the legal decision as principally turning on a conflict, complicated by

race, between the "natural" drive of motherhood and a genetic claim to fatherhood. Although Anna Johnson had natural feelings of a maternal bond, the court saw them as the product of a kind of "false consciousness," promoted in part by her ultrasound visions of the fetus. The court, challenged to contain "what signified as excess within the context of conventional understandings of parent and family," and "to (re)naturalize and (re)authorize extant forms of life against other possible forms and formations," found a genetic connection to be paramount, making and sustaining the "family unit" (97). Also, the court prioritized the business nature of the relation between Johnson and the Culverts over any maternal bonding. The fetus, from the moment of fertilization, was the Calvert's "property." Anna Johnson made a deal, and so she ought not to have allowed herself to become emotionally connected to a fetus that belonged to the Calverts.

In this case, because of the submerged issue of race, the question of "property rights" in the child became secondary. Rather than base its decision in custody law, the court found the genetic connection between the Calverts and the child to be the source and sustenance of the "family unit" (97). Both the court and the media denied that race played any role in the proceedings, which Hartouni finds astonishing, even pathological. Johnson was a black, single mother, who had been on welfare and accused of welfare fraud. She was thus marked as a person capable of deceiving and exploiting the Calverts, and, poised against the background of 1980's narratives about black women, she was also positioned as capable of breeding but not mothering children (96). The court's emphasis on biology as the family's constitutional element, for Hartouni, indicates the pervasive circulation of meanings and histories attached to race throughout the trial.

Hartouni amplifies her discussion of race and social perceptions of motherhood by examining discourse around *The Bell Curve*, a conservative work on IQ and race. [7] In Hartouni's assessment, *The Bell Curve* proposes that the greatest contemporary threat to the U.S. economy (and thus to U.S. society) is the rapid growth of a "cognitive underclass" of poor, "dull" and disproportionately black persons. The book thus accuses "dull" black women who beget illegitimate, "dull" children of irresponsibly destroying U.S. culture. Furthermore, the book charges, these "dull" black women are aided and abetted by national fertility policies that subsidize reproduction through welfare and condone reckless breeding by, for instance, not requiring temporary sterilization through the use of contraceptive devices such as Norplant.

The Bell Curve generated numerous responses and challenges, all notable for their silence on the book's indictment of black women. For Hartouni, this silence reveals the widespread acceptance of claims based on genetics as "scientific truth." Historically, negative perceptions of black women's reproductive strategies came from disparate treatment of white and black mothers of "illegitimate" children. Prior to the 1950s, having a child out of wedlock, for women of either race, indicated congenital mental incapacity. In the post-war era, a bullish market for adoptable white children led to seeing white single mothers as simply morally misguided. Since black children have never become a valued commodity, black mothers of "illegitimate" children continue to signify "genetic incapacity and...an uninhibited biological impulse to copulate and breed" (108).

Now, although abortion still occupies a central position on "social problem"

agendas, welfare reform has become a major priority. In welfare debates and other public performances, politicians, policy makers and the media relentlessly use black women as a trope for "social pollution and pathology" (109). Like the shifting visions of "fetus" and "motherhood," claims such as those made by *The Bell Curve* find potency in their "scientific" foundations. And, like stories about women's "natural" drives, these claims stem from a perceived need to stabilize potential disturbances in existing class, racial and gender classifications. Explaining poor black women's situation in terms of genetics (re)naturalizes class and racial differences as rooted in biology. For Hartouni, "scientific" explanations make "medical" solutions — e.g., enforced chastity through welfare ineligibility, temporary sterilization via surgically-implanted contraceptives, or eugenically-motivated proposals as in *The Bell Curve* — seem reasonable and morally imperative to policy makers and the public.

Hartouni also sees cultural anxiety about human cloning as arising from the need to make sense of and to sustain race and class differences. Initially, in vitro specialists developed cloning as a technology that would facilitate the drive of maternity by increasing the likelihood of producing viable embryos for implantation. Like surrogacy, in vitro fertilization produced speculation about grotesque and unnatural possibilities. Originating in the 1960s, these fantasies were reinvigorated by a 1993 report that scientists had successfully cloned human embryos. By 1993, however, in vitro fertilization was a culturally accepted technology. So why, Hartouni asks, does hysteria about human cloning persist?

Turning to Donna Haraway's metaphor of the "border war," Hartouni suggests that cloning provokes a

"well-scripted border skirmish in ongoing contests over who and what gets to count as fully human" (119).

Opponents to cloning object to its possible use for eugenics; its potential to (further) commodify human life; its disruptive effect on "natural" kinship structures; and its potential to irreversibly disrupt conventional understandings of identity and individuality. Of these objections, Hartouni sees the last as the most significant. Positing a genetic basis for class and racial differences provides a biological explanation for not only individual originality and authenticity, but also for cultural diversity. Cloning, by threatening to disrupt this basis, tends to precipitate frantic retelling of identity stories that confirm

"the ideological centerpiece of Western thought, humanism's unique, self-contained, self-determining individual" (119).

The self-contained and self-determining individual implies an opposite, however. This opposite is the "monster," an unnatural, ill-conformed person who threatens established categories and values. In the popular language of science, biology explains such persons as genetically abnormal. For Hartouni, genetics thus provides an acceptable way to soothe disturbances to conservative ideas about maternity, race or social class caused by "monsters" like Mary Beth Whitehead, who tried to "steal" a baby from a middle class couple, or Anna Johnson, who claimed that a white baby "belonged" to her. Genetics also explains the "monstrous" behavior of the black single mother, always seen as unfit and dependent on welfare; the pregnant woman who smokes or drinks; or the woman

who chooses to abort her unviable fetus in the third trimester of pregnancy.

These genetic explanations also appear in the movies, where difference frequently is represented as monstrosity. In *CITIZEN RUTH*, for example, Ruth is an emotional monster whose pregnancy fails to arouse any maternal feeling. She is also monstrous in appearance and behavior. Since the film provides no narrative explanation for her situation, Ruth's lack of "natural" maternal feeling, and her ignorance, crassness, substance abuse and criminal propensity, can only be attributed to something essentially not biologically "normal" about the character.

Monsters, Hartouni suggests, signify an excess of cultural meaning. Yet a proliferation of "monsters" that cannot be tamed to respect conventional boundaries represents possibility as well as problem. Perhaps, Hartouni concludes, borrowing from Marilyn Strathern, the issue with respect to new reproductive processes and practices is not "whether these new processes are good or bad," but rather, "how we should think them and how they will think us" (132).⁸

In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway focuses on the future, imagining a mythical creature, the cyborg, as a symbol of pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and of deliberation in their construction. Rather than continuing with the same old border war, Haraway suggests that the cyborg might renegotiate the troubled relations of humans to technology, liberating us from preconstituted categories and social roles and from Western horrors of difference. In *Cultural Conceptions*, Hartouni, who studied with Haraway, suggests that new ways of seeing past and present controversies over reproductive technology might accelerate a reconciliation between organism and machine. By revisioning, we might turn away from pre-scripted battles that justify conservative victories by playing on fears of monstrosity and a belief in science as an objective source of truth. We might move toward an innovative and equal land where cyborgs might thrive.

As a proposal for a new understanding of recent cultural debates about the uses and practices of reproductive technology, *Cultural Conceptions* makes valuable connections between the border war and essential issues of diversity and difference. Hartouni's primary concern, as her conclusion shows, is to explicate the stakes of the struggle, rather than to suggest the terms of a cease-fire. For discouraged feminists, however, *Cultural Conceptions* might well be useful in strategizing a counter-attack to the current assault on reproductive freedoms and rights. Nevertheless, in the context of present initiatives, Hartouni's allusions to the possibilities opened by cultural disturbances seem regretfully wishful. *Cultural Conceptions* may help us to see fissures, but, in fact, the recent uproar over Dolly, the Scottish sheep; Clinton's ban on human cloning research, and new laws attacking reproductive freedoms indicate that these fissures have yet to broaden into possibility-sized openings.

One hopes, naturally, that viewing these issues in close-up will inform and inspire additional work on broadening the fissures. By connecting scientific advancements to a variety of social debates, Hartouni suggests a new way of looking at media representations of reproductive technology and reproductive freedom. As this review suggests, an examination of how these discourses surface in other media contexts might illuminate further how scientific visions originating in elite sectors of society appear in mass culture and how audiences interpret these visions.

Although Hartouni uses specific, situated examples to argue that cultural discourse mediates viewer response, the audiences she chooses — the viewers of *S'ALINE'S SOLUTION*, for instance — may be located at an extreme of particularity of how and where they receive the messages from which they produce meaning.

By examining additional representations made and seen by mass audiences, we might gain further understanding of the diffusion of discourses on reproductive technology from elite institutions, such as the scientific establishment, Congress, the courts, and academia, to a general public. As we slouch toward a future where cyborgs might thrive, however, Hartouni's insights and her careful analysis help us to see how debates over reproductive technology create and sustain conservative categorizations. Without a sophisticated understanding of the stakes involved in humans' relations to technology, we cannot begin to re-imagine reproduction as a flexible process rather than a reiteration of timeless and fundamental hierarchies of race, gender and social class.

NOTES

1. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1991), 150.
2. For examples, see Ruth Hubbard, "Irreplaceable Ewe," *The Nation* 264(11)4.
3. Harold T. Shapiro, "Ethical and Policy Issues of Human Cloning," *Science* 277 (5323), 195-96.
4. Angela Bonavoglia, "Separating Fact from Fiction," *Ms.* 7 (12), 55-56.
5. Rosalind Pollack Petchetschy, "Fetal Images: the Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 13(2) (1987), pp. 263-292.
6. These responses were apparently provoked by a 1991 screening at UC San Diego, as part of a program of six video pieces entitled "The Bad Body" (59, 143, n. 5). Hartouni does not discuss whether the video has screened elsewhere.
7. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994). The principal thesis of the book is that people are born with fixed IQ's, which can never be significantly increased. Therefore, success and failure in the U.S. economy is largely a matter of genes.
8. Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Dividers and Doorways

by Kaucyila Brooke

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HOW TO (DE)PERSONALIZE YOUR LIFESTYLE
WITH ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

For the last four summers, during several smoggy weeks in early July,[1][[open notes in new window](#)] I have made a daily trip down the heavily trafficked Sunset Boulevard to the edge of the nice part of West Hollywood to the Directors Guild of America for the annual queer film festival. There is usually a big line of cars turning left into the side street, then another line up of cars waiting to get into the underground parking. I am usually impatient because I'm usually late. On this particular evening, in mid July, 1995,¹ I meet a friend for dinner before the screening and she is maneuvering us through the gridlock in her sport utility vehicle. I am insulated from the stagnant heat within the comfort of leather seats and darkly tinted windows. An impatient driver in a red Mazda Miata honks his horn, revs his motor and yells, "Get out of the way, you fucking faggots!" as he passes us. I barely hear him over the air conditioning and the stereo system. "Was he talking to us?" I say. "If he was he got it wrong," she says. "We're fucking dykes!"

We enter the cool, subterranean zone and my friend points out an empty unidentified but reserved parking space. "That's Jodie Foster's parking space," she says. "You know, she has an office in this building, but it is a big secret." We park and walk through the poured cement structure and enter the gold-flecked mirrored elevator. We emerge into the marble lobby of the DGA. At the information desk a representative of GLAAD (Gay Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) displays the kd Lang/Cindy Crawford cover of *Vanity Fair*. She asserts that the cover is exploitative and gender stereotyped. We say we think it's hot and go to get a cup of coffee.

In L.A.'s endless grid, the evidence of a centralized community is fugitive. Within this metropolis lies the closeted Hollywood — the same city where Rock Hudson hid his gay life and his battle with AIDS. OUT ON THE SCREEN is a small non-profit organization in a factory town of simulated narrative identities. Originally called the Gay and Lesbian Media Coalition (GLMC), the organization began in 1982 as an outgrowth of the Film and Television Archives at UCLA. Larry Home, a UCLA film program graduate, and Bob Rosen of the Archive decided that it was time for L.A. to have an international gay and lesbian film festival. The first two

festivals were called the First and the Second Annual Gay and Lesbian Media Festival. By 1985 the name of the festival had changed to the '85 L.A. International Gay & Lesbian Film/ Video Festival and had expanded to include film screenings at a Hollywood theater, video screenings at the American Film Institute and a two-day conference still held at UCLA's Melnitz Auditorium, the original venue. By 1986 the GLMC had become a non-profit organization completely separate from the umbrella of UCLA.

In 1995 the GLMC changed the name of its festival to OUT ON THE SCREEN to reflect its unique relationship to the entertainment industry. Some in the restructured organization felt the need to avoid the clumsy sounding title of the previous years festival. Hence the festival name was changed from the 12th Annual L.A. International Gay & Lesbian Film & Video Festival to the catchy and corporate sounding UTFEST: The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. Dropping the number, the words annual, video and international from the title also signaled a change in focus away from experimental and international media and towards narrative films. A member of the new and expanded board even arranged to have an animated logo with a music sting created by a title house. At the beginning of every screening festival goers giggled at the gold lettered logo with the moving specular highlight that appeared out of the filmic void and announced itself with the grandiosity comparable to the Dolby or THX stinger often seen in commercial cinema houses. The catchy title and commercial focus are the ways the L.A. test hopes to distinguish itself from the other 45 plus U.S. gay and lesbian film festivals now in existence.

The recent changes in structure indicate the organization's interest in increased professionalization. In the lingo of non-profits, OUT ON THE SCREEN has progressed from a founder driven organization to a shared leadership organization. Whereas Larry Horne functioned as both administrator, fundraiser and film programmer, Morgan Rumpf the current executive director has a background in non-profit management and little experience or expertise in the arts. Programming decisions are the responsibility of the festival programmers. The board of directors has increased in size from ten people who included the staff and the director to its current sixteen without the inclusion of staff. The board has been stacked with industry executives, producers and writers to provide independent queer filmmakers with support and entrance into the mainstream film industry. The 1995 festival included networking parties for the filmmakers in attendance. This professionalism spilled onto the floor of the theaters where special seats were set aside for the artists and board members. Even the dimming of the lights didn't ebb the flow of business cards as the opening credits began to roll.

Clearly, shrinking public grants for the arts in these conservative times and the expectation that non-profits will shift their support base to corporations and individual donors motivates these changes. The festival received no NEA funding for the last four years. Four years ago, 40% of the festival funding was from grants as compared to last year's 17%. Corporate support has grown proportionately over the last three years. The effect of this industry networking on the festival programming is to have less experimental and activist work screened. There were fewer video activists and avant-garde artists in attendance and fewer still who could look to UTFEST as a venue to screen their work.

OUT ON THE SCREEN has determined that New York and San Francisco audiences are more hungry for experimental work and that LA audiences expect higher production values. The demand for high production values will exclude activist work, which by its very nature is roughly produced and often anti-aesthetic by design. When I interviewed Morgan Rumpf in the staff offices, he told me several times that the organization is committed to presenting quality programming. In this case, the vagueness of the word quality ultimately narrows the spectrum of artistic production and promotes a conservative agenda.

CHARBONNEAU, WILSONVILLE, OREGON

This will be the first Christmas I have spent with my family in twenty years. I stopped going home in the seventies when it became more and more uncomfortable to leave my lesbian community behind and enter the cozy world of husbands, children and homeownership. I had become a visitor at the primary site of family intimacy and the ignorance and the disinterest in the particular cultural experience of my life consistently produced alienation and depression for me. But now my father is alone and I worry how he will survive without my mother. Putting my own comfort and expectations aside I honor his request for a family Christmas together.

I receive a letter from him with instructions for the gift giving. My father suggests that we do whatever we want for our immediate family — "spoil em rotten, if you like" — but that we are not responsible for anyone other than whom he has selected for us. I have apparently drawn, by proxy, the name of my youngest nephew, and it is suggested that I spend no more than \$25.00 on this gift. I think, well, that's too bad that he's controlling everything so much, but on the other hand, maybe it's a relief because I don't know what all my nephews and nieces like anyway. I figure that I'll give presents to my two sisters, my brother and my father. I decide that it would be nice to give them photographs. It is, after all, what I do. Well, it's not exactly what I do; I really don't think they'd appreciate photo and text strip narratives that investigate lesbian culture. I remember that I've got all those images of abandoned railroad buildings, granges, grain elevators, and bowling alleys from Central Oregon. I'll matte them and they'll be good Oregon gifts for my Oregon family.

We are gathered at my father's place in the planned community of Charbonneau in Wilsonville, Oregon. Charbonneau was one of the first of these controlled developments in the Portland area. My parents moved there in 1973 after everyone had grown and my mother's arthritis made it impossible for her to negotiate the stairs in the family home. Conveniently located next to Interstate 5 (but isolated from either urban or suburban shopping centers or services), Charbonneau has grown to include condominiums, apartments, million dollar "streets of dreams" and a retirement center for its aging residents. The housing development was named for Toussaint Charbonneau, the French explorer who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their westward scouting expedition to what would become know as the Oregon Territory. The nostalgic invocation of pioneer authenticity is further embellished by such street names as Sacajawea Way, French Prairie Road, and Boones Bend Road.

We are gathered in the living room. It is Christmas eve and everyone is bringing the presents to put under the tree and I'm teasing everyone with, "Oh look, this is for

you, so and so," and my brother remarks paternalistically, which just irritates the shit out of me, "We understood and I think your sisters did too that immediate family meant our spouses and children. So we didn't get you a present. I mean *we* did because we *drew* your name." I say, in a controlled voice, that I understood the instructions differently. But I am close to tears, and I am so fucking angry at their insensitivity. So I go to the bedroom to do something else, and the tears rush out and my sister walks by, and my other sister pops in, and they are hugging me and asking what's up, and I say something vague about how it's just a hard time of year for me. But I don't say that I'm upset because they don't consider me their immediate family. I don't want to be petty.

Christmas morning after breakfast I take on the role of Santa Clause. I watch my sisters and my brother exchange gifts with their families. My Dad has made an effort and given me a few extra things. I am excited about the presents that I'm giving everyone. Unfortunately, they don't know what to think about these pictures of old buildings or why anyone would photograph the facade of a bowling alley at sunset. Later I talk to my lover on the phone and she sympathizes. She says her family never likes the photographs that she gives them either. I describe the "immediate family scenario," and she says she is so happy to be away from the family Christmas this year. I say, "I dunno, honey, I just think that Christmas is for Heterosexuals." She laughs and says she wishes she had that on a T-shirt.

It is the day after Christmas, and after dinner my other nephew and I are discussing what film to go and see. He asks me if I've seen HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS. He says he thinks Jodie Foster is a really great actress and a wonderful director. I'm ready to blow my top because I haven't said what I really think about anything for three days, which is unusual for me. My brother is standing nearby and says, "Oh you and Hinckely, I know what you see in Jodie Foster." My nephew doesn't really get my brother's sarcasm and just repeats, "No, I just think she's such a good director". I begin attacking my nephew (whom I adore) for his ideas. "How can you say that? Did you see that horrible film NELL that she made?" "You didn't like that?" he says, "I thought it was wonderful. What didn't you like about it?" Which I can't really answer because I didn't see it, and I'm in it now and I can't admit that I didn't see it. "It was horrible schlock," I say. "Films about women who can't speak are always popular. She'll probably get an award for it because films about mute women always do well. Think of JOHNNY BEL!NDA!" I say this, knowing full well that he's never even heard of the film or seen it because he doesn't like films that aren't in color. I go on, "No one in Hollywood respects her anyway because she is such a closet case."

Everything is out of control. Now I am assuming a phony attitude as if I am somehow part of Hollywood people in the know or even care what the supposed people in Hollywood think. "I didn't know that she was gay," he says. "Yeah," I say, "and in Los Angeles people resent her for making such heterosexual films and not coming out. At the Dyke march this last year everyone was chanting, 'We're here! We're queer! We don't see Jodie Foster!'"

Now I've done it! I've come home for a family Christmas and after three days of attempted conformity I've just said "closet case," "dyke," identified myself as a "dyke marcher" and "queer." To which my brother responds, "Well, it wouldn't do anything for you even if she did come out." Which I actually agree with, and I'm

aware that this whole interlude in the kitchen is directed at my brother, not my nephew, and he has just lit the powder keg. At a loss for any response, I raise my voice and pronounce, "You don't know anything about my life!" and storm (because there is no better way to describe it) out of the kitchen dramatically, down the hallway and close the door behind me to the guest bedroom.

WEST HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Initially the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Media Coalition Film Festival was shown at UCLA's Melnitz auditorium, in other small theaters, and alternative art spaces that were spread throughout Hollywood and West Hollywood. In 1988 it moved to Hollywood and the smoky glass and steel building of the Directors Guild of America. This was perceived as a coup which not only legitimized queer film/video festival but provided the advantage of comfortable viewing in a building that housed three screening rooms, secure parking, and was located in a good neighborhood. The festival feels that this venue is perfect for its programming. It features a small forty seat theater (which they think is perfect for screening videotape) to a mid-size for documentary and short films to a large theater usually reserved for narrative feature films. Apparently the audience is happy with the DGA, and the festival administrators are pleased to have the event in one location.

In particular, the audience likes the lobby for it creates the possibilities for meeting interesting people, cruising, or having a cup of coffee to discuss the films with other festival goers. The staff of OUTFEST observed that multiple communities of queers in L.A. become spatially adjacent as they wait in line for the different programs. For example, they suggested, a program oriented toward gay and lesbian teenagers may be letting out at the same time that the leather community might be lining up. In a city which affords little opportunity for street culture, the lobby of the DGA during the festival becomes one of the few places where one can experience something like a public community space.

Ironically though, the lobby is private property where the OUT ON THE SCREEN audience is protected from the threatening circumstances that potentially accompany being out on the street.[2] The DGA is located in a relatively wealthy section of the city where the absence of street life forces reliance on the automobile. The hermetically sealed, air-conditioned interior of the physical building embodies the contemporary search for bourgeois security in the city of Los Angeles. Here public street life becomes replaced with the privately owned space of the supermall and multiplex theater.

In "The World In A Shopping Mall," Margaret Crawford points out that mall builders have carefully studied the spending patterns of their presumed consumers, focusing on ethnic composition, income levels and changing regional tastes. Managers are constantly adjusting the mix of shops and entertainment to update and refine consumer profile. As she says,

"They know for example, that their average customer is a 40.3-year-old female with an annual income of over \$33,000.00, who lives in a household of 1.7 people. She is willing to spend more than \$125.00 for a coat and buys six pairs of shoes a year." [3]

The mall then produces itself for this ideal consumer.

Last year, for the first time in the history of the festival, OUT ON THE SCREEN hired CommSciences to conduct an audience survey. At first look, this interest in the composition of their audience seems an admirable effort on the part of OUT ON THE SCREEN to identify and potentially expand the communities it reaches. However, the survey is actually motivated by the desire to market the festival to the entertainment industry and its other sponsors. The OUTFEST '96 Sponsorship Packet outlines the demographic profile of "the highly affluent lesbian and gay audience." It goes on to say:

"This premium market has high levels of discretionary income and is predisposed to spend it with companies that want and solicit their business. Additionally, lesbian and gay consumers are typically loyal to businesses that actively support lesbian and gay arts and other events. Fifty two percent of our highly educated audience households have incomes over \$50,000.00 per year. The majority fall into the highly desirable DINK (Double Income No Kids) category. Nearly fifty percent of our audience identifies their occupation as Business/Professional and over twenty five percent are employed in the entertainment industry."

The profile statistics also indicate that the age group falls between twenty six to forty five, gender is split 59% male, 41% female, and that 75% of the audience is white.

The structural changes and the reorientation toward the entertainment market has affected the festival's accessibility to the communities that lie beyond West Hollywood (significantly known as the Boys Town of greater Los Angeles). Because the move to the DGA venue increased the cost of festival passes, many working-class lesbians, Latinos, and African Americans, who have formed strong gay and lesbian communities in sections of the city outside West Hollywood, were ultimately excluded from participation in the festival. Lawrence Knopp describes the urban privatization in his essay, "Sexuality and Urban Space":

"Relatively privileged sexual non-conformist (e.g. white gay men) have forged networks and institutions which facilitate the practice of their particular sexualities as well as the perpetuation of other structures of oppression. The intersection of these networks and institutions with recent industrial and occupational restructurings (the expansion of mid-level managerial, other white-collar and certain service-sector jobs, whose cultural milieu are socially tolerant) have developed into the material bases of the largely urban-based, predominantly white, and male-dominated gay social and political movements. These movements have taken their own alternative codings of space out of the closet and into the public sphere, but usually within racist, sexist and pro-capitalist discourses." [4]

VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA

Three to four times a week I drive north on Interstate 5 about 35 miles from my apartment in the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles, to teach at an art college in the suburban town of Valencia, California. Cal Arts is an experimental school

that was established in the early seventies by Walt Disney to have an integrated approach to all the arts. Like other art schools, the students are constantly pushing the edges of everything—from their chosen artistic discipline, to their social behavior to their style of dress. Because of the cost of a private education, the students tend to be white and privileged although in recent years monies have been found for minority scholarships, and the racial diversity of both the faculty and student body is changing. Cal Arts was the site of the Feminist Studio Art Program started by Judy Chicago and Mimi Shapiro, and in recent years the faculty and students have had a number of out spoken queer artists and activists.

There is an uncomfortable fit between the local community and the "weirdos" at the art school. Valencia/ Newhall was begun as a planned community in the early seventies to provide housing for those Southern California residents taking part of the white flight exodus from the post-Watts-riot Los Angeles. Students from Cal Arts are not always welcome at local businesses because of the nonconformity of their appearance. Students of color have had difficulty writing checks at local grocery stores. The local teenagers come to Cal Arts parties seeking bohemian, wild experiments and sometimes harass students.

It's Valentine's day and I have big plans with my lover after my day of teaching. I am deeply steeped in a lecture about the Representation of the Family in (primarily) American Photography after World War Two. I critique the *Family of Man* exhibition and book for its totalizing view of the nuclear family, for the sentimentalization of motherhood and for the gender stereotyping. I discuss the 1991 exhibition at MOMA, "The Pleasures and Tenors of Domestic Space," and talk about how its continued investigation of the dysfunctioning heterosexual family left the family unexamined as a political structure. I end my lecture finally by looking at work from the 70s that interrogates the family and re-represents it as a political rather than a personal/private institution.

At a faculty meeting I line up Valentine candies on the table in front of me while we discuss enrollment. I always feel uncomfortable when we talk about numbers and faculty lines and the cost per student. I mean I am a teacher for godssake, not a salesperson, and I want to think that education is more than a sales pitch for popularity. So I make a few comments about recruitment; we all do. But mostly I am lining up the pink, red and white Valentine m&ms and little message hearts and thinking about getting home in time for romance.

I don't remember ever having had a special Valentine's dinner date before. But now I have a new lover and she says Valentine's Day is her very favorite holiday. She has planned a special dinner and I'm game to try this traditional romance thing. I keep thinking about the gift I have to give her and anticipating her excitement as I put it around her wrist. I feel like I am revisiting all the heterosexual rituals that I had dismissed as a young anarchist and later as a feminist. My new lover treats me like a lady. And though I'm a bit awkward about the whole thing, I'm more willing to experiment with gender roles these days.

The meeting is finally over. My dean had just a few more things to bring up. I say that I need to go because I have plans. He says that he does too.

It is a dark and rainy. I wander through the parking lot in a haze of sugared distraction. I'm thinking about what I might wear to excite my lover. I drive out of

the parking lot, and rather than cross multiple lanes of traffic I very deliberately take the safer route and turn right down to the stop light where I plan to make a U turn. I get to the light, stop, make my U turn, and plow my front bumper into the driver's door of a new white Mustang GT.

We pull over to the side of the road and stop the cars. I get out and a big blond young man gets out of the driver's seat. Then I see a young woman get out, and she's shaking and I'm apologizing all over the place. She starts crying and saying that she's shook up because she was badly hurt in an accident a year ago. He is very sweetly reassuring her that every thing is OK, that no one is hurt, and he holds her while she cries. I notice a baby's head in the back seat in one of those car seats and I say, "Is the baby okay?" and he says "Yes, the baby is fine," and this beautiful young blond woman reaches into the car and picks up the adorable blond baby which she holds close to her body while her husband and I investigate the cars for damage.

I have run smack into the family. Blond, young and suburban. I am worried about my insurance and hope they will let me pay them off. I explain that I am faculty at the Art School to make myself seem trustworthy and contextualize my eccentric clothing. He explains that he works for U.P.S. and he had just picked his wife up from her job at the hospital down the road. I know this is hokey but I want to be them. I say this to my lover when I see her later, in between, "Are you okay?" and "Oh, honey, you must have been so frightened." She says, "You mean you want to go straight?" I say, "No, I wanted to be them all simultaneously." And I will never be them. Maybe I'm not really "okay." I will never be young and married, blond and gentle and hopeful, driving a beautiful white mustang through Valencia. Instead my car is plowing my life into theirs. I have lost my critical distance.

WEST HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

"Smirnoff presents OUTFEST '96" announces itself from banners up and down Sunset Boulevard and throughout West Hollywood. The opening night reception features free Smirnoff vodka martinis. During the introductory remarks at the beginning of each night's programming, the administration of OUT ON THE SCREEN remind the "gay community" of our good fortune to have such prestigious and solid sponsorship for the film festival this year. Entering the DGA, one passes under a large commercial banner spelling out SMIRNOFF in giant logo red letters. Anyone not-in-the-know driving by must think it's a corporate convention.

Filmmakers, film theorists and film viewers visit and smoke outside under the banner and joke with people waiting in long slow ticket lines. We suggest, "If you let everyone know that you are related to Mr. Smirnoff or even better just tell them that you *are* Mr. fucking Smirnoff or *fucking* Mr. Smirnoff, the line would move a little quicker." In Hollywood, it's all about who you are and who you know. I try to drink one of the Vodka martinis. I can't do it. "Presented by Smirnoff" is now designed as part of the festival logo, and everywhere you see the OUTFEST '96 logo you see "presented by Smirnoff" over the number "96." It's on the membership badge I wear around my neck. There I am Kaucyila Brooke "presented by Smirnoff."

Starting with OUTFEST '96 we also need to thank Coors Light.[5] Each evening the staff of OUTFEST carefully points out that Coors has changed their politics around

Gays and Lesbians due to "the boycott," and I keep wondering what about their policies towards Latinos and their support of the Contras? Did they make some kind of reparation to the Sandinistas? Or don't we the festival goers care about that? And for that matter, I don't know a thing about the other sponsor, American Airlines and their employee policies, but each night I thank the triumvirate of Smirnoff, Coors Light (with their new and improved politics), and American Airlines for presenting and sponsoring gay and lesbian culture. And if I forget to say my prayers before I enter the dream narratives of cinematic jouissance, the festival staff reminds me proudly that we are supported by smirnoffcoorslightamericanairlines, and the company logos flash across the screen, and all my Vance Packard paranoia about Hidden Persuaders are lulled to sleep by the comfort of the darkened theater and the security of being surrounded by "my people."

There are more stars in attendance this year than ever before. A friend points out Lilly Tomlin. My girlfriend says, "Oh my God, it's DavidfuckingGeffen 'out' at the film festival! Look at the boys surrounding him!" and most importantly kd lang is there listening to The Murmurs play after one of the evening lesbian feature narrative film screenings, which they say are so abundant this year. But, of course, we still don't see Jodie Foster, and obviously nobody really cares about it because that was last year's dyke march slogan anyway. I don't recognize many people in the audience this year except people that my friend the Hollywood scriptwriter has introduced me to at parties at her house. I don't see the experimental video artist in her funky '70s hip bohemian clothes, don't see any members or former members of Paper Tiger TV, I don't see the dyke who produced video with teenage mothers from South Central LA, and I don't see straight artist friends who produce and write critically about experimental media. I see glamorous women and handsome men in designer clothing.

We drink our way through Hennessy Martini Coors Light Smirnoff up to the Closing Night Film and Reception. We wait through more thanks to our sponsors to see LATE BLOOMERS, which is a narrative feature about two middle age women in suburban who fall in love and get married. It could be good. The filmmakers, the Dyer sisters, are in attendance and they say that they didn't make a political film. They say it is a film about family or what family should be. I get edgy, which isn't difficult to do by the end of this extended trade fair for DINKS. A few young cultural activists are sitting behind me and they mutter, "What would be so bad about making a political film for christssakes?"

Then a representative from The Freedom to Marry Coalition steps up to the podium and gives a boilerplate speech about the importance of the marriage issue and ends by pounding her fist on the podium while she says, "When we have won this battle we will have won the WAR!" I groan, and the muttering behind me turns into an animated conversation in the lobby after the movie. We complain about assimilationist politics. We agree that one conservative issue should not galvanize an entire cultural movement. I blurt out, "Maybe we should think more about divorce!" but I'm not really sure what I'm trying to say. Later my lover tells me that she's convinced that I said that because I'm not over my last break up. I tell her not to personalize it, and my irritation at the whole bogus commodified issue lashes out and hurts her feelings. We finish off the evening and the festival, embattled in a slightly too loud "discussion" about what we mean by commitment over a plate of

Pad Thai at a late night Thai restaurant.

NOTES

I. In writing about the locational politics of Los Angeles's own Gay and Lesbian film festival, it is my intention to disrupt a linear description of the festival's history with other spatially determined events of my life. I'm interested in the position of a festival participant, the conditions of getting to and from the event, the actual physical impact of the building which houses the event, and the position of the same person as a participant at a family ritual existing within the predetermined space of a planned housing community.

2. Outfest '97 expanded beyond the Directors Guild to includes screenings at the Harmony Gold and Laemelle's Sunset 5. Both theaters are within walking distance of one another. Taking advantage of the unusual opportunity to be out on the street, I walked the estimated eight minute walk down Sunset Boulevard to the Harmony Gold Theatre. Having ample time to get there, I sauntered leisurely in my silver vintage dress accented by spectacular footwear of matching silver colored Doc Marten high-top boots. Once again the Doppler effect of the angry taunt "faggot" screamed out from a passing vehicle misnamed me and confirmed that threats and verbal harassment are more than paranoid fantasies. The festival does keep changing its relation to the screen and the street and therefore the participants' experiences of its relation to Los Angeles.

3. Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," in Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), p.10

4. Lawrence Knoop, "Sexuality and Urban Space: A Framework for Analysis", in David Bell & Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 158

5. During the opening night of OUTFEST '97 at the historic and prestigious downtown movie palace, the Los Angeles Theatre, a small but determined band of politically concerned community organizers waved signs and shouted slogans warning festival goers against trusting the supposedly changed political policies of Coors Brewing Company. They continued to protest throughout the duration of the festival by picketing, distributing leaflets and writing letters to the local gay press.

Fringe cultures

by Gina Marchetti

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Cagle, Van M. *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995. 240 pp.

Suarez, Juan A. *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. 353 pp.

When looking at relations between the present and the recent past, Andy Warhol looms large as a figure in art, film, rock, and culture generally. While glitter, glam, and the superstar may evoke feelings of nostalgia, it is au courant to use queer theory, concepts of camp and trash, and postmodernism to get a take on the relation between commercial and so-called "high" culture. During the heyday of his Factory, Warhol stood at the eye of the hurricane, a still observer, a motionless camera, who took in all that revolved around him. Even in his grave, Warhol is still at the center of things.

It is fitting, then, that there should be so much recent scholarly interest in Warhol and his legacy. The two books discussed here represent only a fraction of the current material available on Warhol. Unlike other works which focus exclusively on Warhol, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture* and *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars* place Warhol within a broader context: rock and youth subculture in the first instance and avant-garde cinema in the second. Indeed, more than Warhol connects these two books. Along with their examination of Warhol and Pop Art, both books conjure up a vision of the cultural fringes of the 1960s/early 1970s.

Because of the complexity and extent of Warhol's legacy, it takes courage to write on this topic. So much has already been said and so many preconceptions already formed. Even before reading Cagle's and Suarez' books, I had my own ideas about what needed to be said about Warhol and youth subcultures, gay liberation, and postmodern aesthetics. Many of those who come to these books with their own experiences of the 1960s and 1970s may find themselves in similar circumstances. When reading these books, I found that I needed to put my own ideas aside in order to see the contribution each author has made to this vitally important area of cultural research. I approached these books with the assumption that the main thrust of each would be a thorough reexamination of Warhol in relation to both pre- and post-Stonewall gay culture. I expected a critical dialogue to be set up that would incorporate more current queer-studies scholarship. In both cases, I was

disappointed.

Because of the book's title, I expected *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars*, in particular, to deal with gay subcultures, mass media representations of the fringe, and queer aesthetics. It was a rather long wait in that book to get to page 126 and find the following under the heading, "Gay Subcultures and the Underground": Hence besides being part of the history of the U.S. avant-garde cinema, underground films were also part of gay American culture. They fashioned models of subjectivity and desire that reflected the experiences of the (male) urban gay communities of the time. In the three chapters that follow on Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, and Andy Warhol, the emphasis remains on the auteurs in question and the history of U.S. avant-garde cinema. The study neglects the bike boys, drag queens, and superstars that provided these filmmakers with their inspiration and subject matter.

Similarly, in *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture*, I expected an emphasis on youth subcultures. The book's title seemed to promise it would reconstruct the much misunderstood, but still extremely influential, glitter/glam youth subculture. Unfortunately, after devoting a sizable chapter to British cultural studies and its formulation of subcultural style and youth subcultures, the book did not follow through with a thorough reevaluation of the glitter/glam subculture. The author clearly had much personal experience with this subculture (in footnotes, he refers to his concert "diary"). So it is disappointing he persistently emphasizes the commercial producers/ performers rather than on those who brought the style out onto the streets and into their daily lives.

Cagle is at his best when he discusses performers that are closest to the fans, like the New York Dolls. This "garage band" never received the commercial or critical success of David Bowie, Lou Reed, or even Iggy Pop, but it managed to maintain a firmer connection to the subcultural milieu from which it emerged. In this instance, the picture given of the glitter subculture could have been fleshed out further with more from Cagle's diary and perhaps some interviews with some of his glitter comrades. As it is, the book tries to get beyond its history of rock facade to look at the larger cultural issues involved. Unfortunately, the project is most successful at what it attempts to transcend, i.e., the history of glitter/glam performers and their relationship to Warhol and his Factory.

Cagle tries to prove that the Factory crowd represents an "in-there" subculture localized in one place around the figure of Warhol, while glitter represents an "out-there" subculture of fans from diffuse locations brought together by the mass media. Both these groups differ significantly from the British, working class, spectacular youth subcultures that were the focus of attention at Birmingham. Cagle stretches British cultural studies' definition of youth subculture to accommodate both groups. In the final analysis, it is difficult to say how important subcultural theory is to an understanding of either the Factory or to the sketchy view given of glitter fans. While Cagle provides a great deal of insight into the personal relationships and business dealings among celebrities like Reed, Bowie, and Warhol, he does not do as much in "reconstructing" the subcultural milieu of those outside the limelight.

If readers put aside these preconceptions or others that the titles of the books may conjure up, much fascinating and useful scholarship can be found in both

Reconstructing Pop/ Subculture and Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars. Cagle shines at rock history. Suarez excels at avant-garde theory and underground film criticism.

Cagle's *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture* is an important step forward in scholarship on rock music. Warhol's role in forming the Velvet Underground and launching the careers of Lou Reed, Nico, John Cale and other rock luminaries has been documented. However, Cagle goes further in uncovering the complex personal relationships between Warhol, Iggy Pop, David Bowie and many others that formed the bedrock of the glitter/glam phenomenon on both sides of the Atlantic. In this book, glitter/glam emerges as a rock "school" of performers and impresarios. Coming together around figures like Warhol and Bowie and places like the Factory and Max's Kansas City, a group of like-minded artistes helped each other explore controversial terrain. Working together, they questioned gender boundaries and challenged aesthetic barriers in a commercial music environment that always maintained a love-hate relationship with the musical and cultural fringe.

Cagle is at his best when he digs into the intimate details of these relationships. For example, he describes a young, soon-to-be-called Iggy Pop meeting the Warhol crowd in Detroit (with a fascinating look at the Detroit/Ann Arbor scene beyond Alice Cooper). He also gives an interesting account of Bowie's bringing Lou Reed out of a slump by producing Reed's Transformer album, which featured the hit single "Walk on the Wild Side," the work which most clearly linked commercial rock with Warhol Pop Art and the avant-garde.

In addition, Cagle must be commended for his ability to read the rock press. Drawing on publications like Creem, Melody Maker, and Rolling Stone, Cagle takes a critical look at how glitter rock created itself through the media, taking control of an aspect of its own publicity unprecedented by earlier rock musicians. Cagle's discussion of Bowie's "bisexual" coming out to the press, for example, is very insightful. However, although Cagle does discuss fans and fanzines, he does not give them the same thorough treatment that he gives performers and their relation to the press.

The book is also lacking in another area. Cagle mentions the importance of performance and theatricality to glitter/ glam, and he goes on to cite the relationship between the phenomenon and films like CABARET as well as the centrality of film in Warhol's disco The Exploding Plastic Inevitable. However, he stops short in his examination of glitter/glam and motion pictures and video. Indeed, a chapter on THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (film and play) may have helped tie up a few loose ends involving youth subculture and glitter/glam performance at the book's conclusion.

Suarez' *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars* also has many fine features. The strong points of this book include the author's ability to articulate some rather complex theoretical issues involving avant-garde politics and aesthetics, the relationship between the avant-garde and commercial culture, and the history of U.S. underground film. Suarez dug deep in these areas and emerged with an articulate and thoughtful account. Although some of this terrain has been covered by other scholars (most notably David James in his fine *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the 1960s*, Princeton, 1989) and his other work on U.S.

underground film), Suarez goes beyond a synthesis of this other research to provide a fresh perspective on Anger, Smith and Warhol's film oeuvres.

There is lengthy introductory material on avant-garde theory and on the social milieu of the U.S. Underground cinema (including some interesting tidbits of gossip/ information on Amos Vogel, Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, P. Adams Sitney, and the like). Unfortunately, after that, the treatment of SCORPIO RISING, FLAMING CREATURES, and a selection of Warhol's films, notably MY HUSTLER and VINYL, seems brief in comparison. However, Suarez must be commended for choosing to look at these filmmakers' more challenging works. While Anger's FIREWORKS provides a clearer point of entry into issues of gay life and aesthetics, SCORPIO RISING's use of Nazi imagery and sado-masochistic biker rituals is ultimately more challenging and much harder to pin down. Here, the author does an excellent job of looking at the various threads of homoeroticism, occultism, and satire that make up this complex work.

Suarez's reconsideration of Jack Smith's notorious FLAMING CREATURES highlights the filmmaker rather than the work itself. Featuring orgies of sexually ambiguous figures and a difficult-to-interpret rape scene, FLAMING CREATURES relies on an aesthetics of performance that puts a halt to many critical forays into understanding its meaning. Not surprisingly, Suarez does more to further an understanding of Smith as a performer in this chapter than the film itself. He also provides insights into the strained relationship between Smith and his principal supporter/arch-enemy Jonas Mekas. The story of Mekas' attempts to "save" Smith's work from censorship and oblivion, much against the wishes of the filmmaker, makes for some fascinating reading.

The chapter on Warhol and his films made between 1963 and 1968 is the most disappointing of the three. Without the textual detail of the chapter on SCORPIO RISING or the "human interest" of the chapter on Jack Smith, this chapter pales in comparison. While it provides some interesting insights into some of the darker aspects of Warhol's oeuvre, it does not provide the depth of analysis displayed in the author's fine discussion of SCORPIO RISING. Indeed, the book as a whole seems to lose steam toward the end, finally petering out completely with a five-page conclusion.

Despite their flaws, both these books make valuable contributions. Both are clearly and engagingly written. I would not hesitate to use either in the classroom. Both do a fine job of inviting the reader to think through for the first time or rethink the fringe cultures of the 1960s/early 1970s. Given that these fringes are now part of the larger weave of our cultural fabric, it is great to have these two works added to the continuing debates surrounding camp, trash, glitter, glam, the avant-garde and postmodernity.

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Wonder of the World. Aumento Ya! *Out at Work. Drawing the Line at Pittston* Organizing and consciousness raising

by John Hess

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At the same time that increasing numbers of labor unions have made organizing a major priority, they have also begun to avail themselves of many new media forms and to use them in new ways. Organizers now use cell phones, fax machines, email, websites, short video pieces, role-playing, and house calls. They do so to stay informed, find possible supporters, and develop solidarity and leadership among workers. This renewal of organizing and development of media forms coincides with encouraging changes that have taken place in the labor movement in recent years, marked by the election of Ron Cary's reform slate to head the Teamsters Union in 1991, the subsequent election of John Sweeney to head the AFL-CIO, followed by labor and academic teach-ins around the country, the founding convention of the Labor Party in 1996, and the founding of Scholars, Artists, and Writers For Social Justice (SAWSJ).

The Labor Party has its base in a number of international, regional and local labor unions as well as in various chapters across the country. It has concentrated on organizing within labor unions and has so far hesitated to enter electoral politics, though many of its activists want to do that (www.labor.net.org/lpa/index.html). SAWSJ grew out of the labor and academic teach-ins and wants to recreate the bond that used to exist between unions and intellectuals. Its chapters engage in a great variety of actions in solidarity with labor such as strikes, organizing drives, and legal struggles (www.sage.edu/html/SAWSJ).

Here, I will discuss four films and videos that examine and reflect on organizing drives, strikes, and legal struggles. All concern internal organizing, that is, the effort to develop greater participation and leadership among a union's rank and file. Often, the works try to grasp what happened in a labor struggle and to explain it to others; they want to teach us about various aspects of trade union activity and enlist our solidarity.

WONDER OF THE WORLD (Lawrence Budner, 1996) seeks to explain the outcome of a long and bitter strike during the early 1980s at Brown and Shape, one of Rhode Island's "Wonders of the World" in the early part of the century when the state became a center of precision tool manufacturing. Typical of current

documentaries made with television and the educational market in mind, it mixes current interviews done with participants in the events and varied, illustrative documentary footage, such as news reports, company documentaries, material shot by the filmmakers, and some still images. The film gives information about the company's history. It analyzes how the company's changing from a family to a corporate business at the turn of the century and then to a transnational corporation after the Second World War created the circumstances whereby the company withdrew first from a familial relationship with its workers and then from most of its connection to the local community. However, the film remains rather sketchy about both the company's decision-making during the strike and the union's thinking and decision-making. For example, we hear hints of differences between the local officials and those at the national headquarters, as one would actually expect in a long strike. But Budner does not examine the division between local and national union policy in the extensive way that Barbara Koppel does, in great detail, in her feature documentary, *AMERICAN DREAM*.

The strongest part of *WONDER OF THE WORLD* lies in its presentation of company history, a shining success story until after WW2 when the company lost direction and could not adjust quickly enough to the rapid changes taking place in world capitalism. At the same time, the International Association of Machinist's (IAM) strike came at a bad time, just after Reagan had broken the PATCO strike and given capital strong encouragement to go after labor. Prior to this historical political intervention, negotiations and strikes usually centered on money, but now they come to center on other issues: job security, work rules, seniority, pensions, part-time workers, two-tier wage scales, and grievance procedures. This was a moment in recent U.S. economic and political history when corporations, large and small, began seriously to try to weaken labor's ability and will to resist speed-ups, downsizing, outsourcing and other forms of work place reengineering. Regretfully although the filmmaker seems to have enough material to explain these issues, he chooses not to, concentrating instead on a rather uncritical history of a local company.

AUMENTO YA! / A RAISE NOW (Tom Chamberlin, 1996) offers a lively contrast to *WONDER OF THE WORLD* in that it unabashedly represents the views of the workers and their union, the Oregon Farm Workers Union (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Nordeste, PCUN). The film concentrates on what the union calls the summer 1995, "10th Anniversary Organizing Campaign." A young Latina who worked in Chicago with the Farm Worker's Ministry (a religious organization that provides assistance to farm workers throughout the country) has come out to Oregon for this campaign. It is her first actual organizing campaign, and she provides an intelligent voice-over narration, which captures her personal excitement and learning as well as presents important factual information about what she sees in the film. Very much in a cinema-verité style, the camera seems to represent the view of this young woman, following the action, attending meetings and walking picket lines. This style seems particularly appropriate because the film focuses on the organizing process itself and especially on the changing consciousness of the Mexican migrant workers. The film emphasizes community formation, bringing together the Mexican workers, mostly indigenous people, the Latino and Anglo organizers, and the hundreds of supporters from all over the country. On the other side we see the non-Spanish-speaking Anglo growers and their Mexican labor contractors milking the workers for all they can get, and we

also see the local police who mostly support the growers. The film has a prologue and an epilogue; it begins with the gathering of forces for the summer campaign and then ends with a review of the campaign's successes. Most of the film, however, concentrates on two particular struggles with two recalcitrant growers who fight the union and win more than they lose.

The film shows us the "messy," imprecise, inconclusive, and even intimate nature of farm worker organizing. The New Deal in the 1930s did not include farm labor in its innovative and progressive labor legislation. When regulated at all, agricultural labor falls under state regulations. Most farm workers have no social security, no minimum wage, no unemployment insurance, and no workman's compensation. INS raids, often invited by the growers, make the work even more terrifying for the mostly immigrant work force. Because of agricultural work's seasonal nature, few growers employ more than a small number of continuing workers. At key moments in the agricultural cycle, for planting and especially for harvesting, labor contractors bring in workers for just few days or weeks. The growers pay as low as they can and then charge the workers for the usually miserable housing the bosses offer. The labor contractors also charge the workers for a ride out to the fields each morning. The grower can pay 15 cents today and 10 cents tomorrow; nothing compels the owner to fix a wage, even from day to day. In many cases, such as these shown in the film, the grower himself deals with the workers in the fields and labor camps. The only real countervailing force is the precariousness of the crops themselves, many of which rot quickly if not picked when ripe.

The film concentrates on two specific organizing drives (really efforts to get a grower to pay more for one harvest of a few days) in strawberry fields, both of which we would have to call failures. In both cases the grower successfully brought in new workers to pick the berries, although one grower lost a considerable portion of his crop because of the delay. Just as the first union drive fails, the union hears that the workers at a nearby farm have, on their own initiative, walked out of the fields, striking for higher pay and better housing conditions. The union organizers move over to that farm, spending a lot of time in the miserable labor camp, in crowded plastic-walled cabins without heat, inadequate bathing facilities, and no phone in the camp. For this the boss charges the workers rent and collects over \$7,000 a month from them.

These farm workers have developed some internal leadership and decry their miserable housing even more than their low pay. They understand that since the grower offered another cent a pound for the strawberries after they walked out, he could pay more. And since he could, he should. At one point the union leadership encourages the workers' elected representatives to bargain directly with the grower themselves rather than have the union leaders take that role. Developing leadership skills and encouraging the workers to build up their the courage to confront the boss directly will increase these workers' ability to organize and maintain a union over the years. The union leaders understand that they have taken on a long-term struggle to change consciousness among the farm workers.

OUT AT WORK (Kelly Anderson and Tami Gold, 1997) is a highly polished film that tells the stories of three people, a white lesbian from Georgia, a white gay man from Detroit, and a black gay man from New York. All three lead fights against various forms of discrimination which they face in the work place. In all three cases

unions play important supportive roles. The film alternates the stories, moving through the stages of discrimination, resistance, group involvement, and denouement. Cheryl has worked for several years as an open lesbian in the kitchen of Cracker Barrel, a Southern-based, anti-union as well as anti-gay restaurant chain, in Bremen, Georgia. Suddenly the company issues a directive that it will not employ homosexuals. Cheryl's pink slip specifically states that they fired her for being a lesbian. Ron, an autoworker in Detroit, hears about the campaign against Cracker Barrel and enlists the support of his UAW local in a march to protest Cracker Barrel's policies. When a picture of him participating in a mostly gay protest appears on the front page of the Detroit Free Press, he begins to suffer vicious harassment on the job, from both co-workers and supervisors. Finally, Nat, a librarian in a public library, becomes involved in issues of discrimination when his lover, David, falls ill with AIDS. Nat becomes involved in a successful effort through his AFSCME local to win domestic partner benefits for gay couples.

Like *AUMENTO YA!* this film examines consciousness, here in regard to people thrown out of their usual routine who react by becoming involved in types of struggles that were previously foreign to them and in which they still feel quite awkward. *OUT AT WORK* is about the coming to consciousness of ordinary working class people. Cheryl becomes involved in Queer Nation (because Act Up sounded too confrontational to her), which in turn builds a broad coalition of church, civil rights and trade union groups to fight Cracker Barrel's anti-gay policies. At the end of the film we learn that Cracker Barrel did not change its policy, and that 41 states still do not have laws protecting gays and lesbians from this kind of workplace discrimination. Ron finally goes to his union local for help and gets it in the form of Mike Harrald, a black union rep who has his own stories of discrimination to tell and who vigorously supports Ron. Finally Ron transfers from Trenton Engines to Chrysler Technology. When anti-gay harassment begins here, several workers in the shop stand up for Ron. He, in turn, takes on management around shop-floor issues and finally his co-workers elect him a delegate to the UAW bargaining convention. There he movingly tells his story from the podium in support of a resolution calling on the union to include protections against discrimination for sexual orientation in all future contracts. The resolution passes unanimously. Nat also turns to his union when David's medical bills become impossible to pay. Nat gets elected to the Executive Board of his AFSCME local, and he also becomes involved in and then chair of the union's Gay and Lesbian Issues Committee.

With considerable justice, unfortunately, unions have received criticism for not protecting gay and lesbian members and even for discriminating themselves. At the same time, unions have also provided many workplace protections against all forms of discrimination. Because they had a union, Ron and Nat had a place to turn to not just for help but also for a way to become actively involved in the issue at hand. Cheryl had no union and lost her job. The community protest she initiated became a valuable learning experience for her and greatly extended her community, but it could not save her job. Clearly we need both more community protests and more righteous unions to fight this kind of discrimination.

DRAWING THE LINE AT PITTSTON (Paper Tiger TV, 1990), like most Paper Tiger productions I have seen, exhibits the series' ragged, low-budget look, feeling as rough and rugged as the people in the Southwestern Virginia mining

communities on which it focuses. Some of the video's footage comes from miner participants, who videotaped events both to record them for posterity and also to document their actions and those of the VA State Police and Pittston's security forces. In February, 1988, the Pittston Coal Co. withdraws from the Bituminous Coal Operators Association and stops making payments to BCOA (which bargains for sixteen coal companies and manages their pension and healthcare plans). This act leaves elderly retirees without healthcare insurance. For the next fourteen months, the company, while bargaining fitfully and certainly not in good faith, tries to impose a variety of changes on the miners. At the same time, however, the miners and particularly the women organize into the Daughters of Mother Jones and prepare for the inevitable strike that came on April 5, 1989.

The video deals with three main issues: first, the extent and result of the women's organizing work in the local community; second, the constantly growing local, then regional, then national, and finally international solidarity; and third, the overwhelming effort on the part of the government at all levels especially the state of Virginia-and the local media to crush the strike. The national media mostly ignores the strike. Toward the end of the film, one miner states: "This is class struggle at its finest." And by this time in the film, his comment seems, if anything, an understatement. Like *AUMENTO YA!* and *OUT AT WORK*, this video also stresses consciousness raising, the way that involvement in struggle teaches people about their world. Watching the State Police roughly handle peacefully demonstrating men and women, watching a judge impose huge punitive fines on individuals and the union, being called terrorists by the company president and by the *Wall Street Journal*, and reading articles sympathetic to strikes in Poland and Russia but nothing about their strike shocks people and teaches them a lot about their position in the world.

At one point, 39 women take over the lobby of the Pittston Company Headquarters and sit-in for 32 hours, identifying themselves only as Daughter of Mother Jones #1, #2, #3, etc. As they tell this story, their pride and excitement are palpable. The miners build Camp Solidarity and hold rallies there every Wednesday evening. As the strike wears on, more and more people from all over the world came to the camp to offer their solidarity and material aide. Finally, on September 17 a group of miners occupy a huge coal-processing plant while 5,000 supporters block the road leading into the plant. When they march out four days later, the struggle is essentially over. Serious negotiations begin, and in February a contract is approved by the rank and file.

These four films employ essayistic interpretive structures imposed after the fact, the better to explain the issues to viewers less familiar with them. This allows filmmakers to make connections that would not have been easy to see in the middle of the battle. Yet, at the same time, the pieces are all straightforward documentaries, appropriate for a wide range of audiences which the works will find in unions and labor studies classes, among community groups interested in working with unions, and in various sorts of high school and university classes. Film teachers will use them as examples of activist media.

In each case, the filmmakers collaborate very closely with individual union participants and leaders. In *AUMENTO YA!* / *RAISE NOW!* and *DRAWING THE LINE AT PITTSTON* union members and leaders play a very direct role in the

construction of the film or video. Similarly, filmmakers work with a labor studies institute to make WONDER OF THE WORLD, and activist filmmakers with labor's financial support make OUT AT WORK. In other words, all four films grow out of very close collaboration between filmmaker-intellectuals and trade unionists. Internal organizing in conjunction with a particular struggle becomes very intense and exciting as this is depicted in terms of visuals, narrative and especially characters. Organizing people who have no union is, in real life, much less dramatic and usually agonizingly slow. Yet we need films and tapes for a more general audience that demonstrate this process in interesting ways, and also ones that unions can use in conjunction with organizing drives. In future issues of JUMP CUT, we intend to discuss these kinds of works, usually made in video, as well. We are excited by this new activity and want to cover it on a regular basis in JUMP CUT.

RESOURCES

Web sites for these works:

- AUMENTO YA!: www.pcun.org
- WONDER OF THE WORLD: www.proteun.org/ilsr
- OUT AT WORK: www.frameline.org
- DRAWING THE LINE AT PITTSTON: www.papertiger.org

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The Aztlán Film Institute's Top 100 List

by Chon Noriega

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In June 1998, the American Film Institute (AFI) unveiled its list of the 100 greatest U.S. movies on nationwide television. The star-studded hoopla commemorated the first 100 years of U.S. filmmaking, while the studios teamed up for the first time ever in order to promote home video rentals and sales, doing so under the guise of historical and artistic appreciation. The AFI, which has recently lost almost all of its federal funding, had learned a valuable lesson or two from the Hollywood deal, allowing it to continue fighting the good fight for the preservation of American film Happy ending.

But what is American film? In fact, what is film? And why should we care? For the AFI, American means Hollywood, while film means popular feature-length narratives. That is why the list contains no independent films, no documentary films, no avant-garde films, no short narrative films, and precious few silent films. But it also explains why the list contains no films directed by women or racial minorities. None! Quite simply, Hollywood is not an equal opportunity employer, and each year the employment numbers get worse.

Such exclusions are of a different order than the galling absence of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* (1923-25), F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927), or any films by Joseph von Sternberg, Buster Keaton, Ernst Lubitsch, Preston Sturges, or Busby Berkeley, let alone films starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers or even Jerry Lewis. These exclusions speak to the present-day market sensibilities and the middlebrow amnesia that guided the AFI endeavor; but, even if they were rectified, the other exclusions would remain unchanged.

[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

But why should we care? Because the list is being done in our name. In essence, the AFI presented a list of the 100 greatest films directed by white men making big profits — or, in the case of *Citizen Kane* (1941), good press — for the major studios. It also presented a list that enshrined a handful of living directors most likely to donate money to the AFI. These are not bad things in and of themselves, if called by their proper name. But their *gravitas* stems from calling the endeavor a measure of our nation's film history. The part becomes greater than the whole. Indeed, when an industry and an institute team up to lay claim to the sum of our

nationality, we lose the one thing they are claiming to preserve: our heritage. Our complex, diverse, and rich heritage.

As a film historian, I have spent the past decade researching U.S. film history—digging through archival holdings and personal papers, conducting numerous interviews, even discovering and preserving lost films, such as the first feature film directed by a Mexican American, Efrain Gutierrez's Please, *Don't Bury Me Alive!* (1976). This independent film, a slice-of-barrio-life that was shot and exhibited in South Texas, outperformed *Superman* (1978) in some small towns, while it single-handedly broke Mexico's monopoly over the 400 Spanish-language theaters in the United States. The film inspired an independent film movement in Mexico, where the state controlled the industry, and among Chicano filmmakers in the United States, who further refined Gutierrez's successful grassroots-marketing strategy. The film, then, is important as an instance of regional filmmaking, as a bicultural and bilingual narrative, and as a precedent that expanded the way films got made in two nations. It is also a compelling film, one made on a dream and a shoestring!

In this respect, Gutierrez is a pivotal figure in the same way as Oscar Micheaux, who directed "race movies" for black audiences from the 1920s to the 1940s, or Maya Deren, whose films, writings, and advocacy efforts provided a paradigm for the development of U.S. avant-garde film from the 1940s to the 1970s, or the multiracial generation of documentary filmmakers who went to the UCLA Ethno-Communications Program in the early 1970s. Need I even mention Spike Lee? If I do, please see *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *4 Little Girls* (1997), and then take another look at the API list, or watch Samuel L. Jackson extolling the aesthetic merits of D.W. Griffith's Klan narrative *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) on the API television special. Then ask, what's wrong with this picture? Lee and these other filmmakers are among a number who have made "American film" for audiences that were segregated in theaters and other public spaces, alienated by stereotypes or outright exclusion from the silver screen, or simply uninspired by Hollywood narrative conventions. But none of them are on the API list.

The irony of this situation is that it reconfirms the equivalence between U.S. film and Hollywood, not just in the public mind, but in the field of film studies itself. Since most film scholars write about Hollywood as *the* American cinema, the exceptions run the risk of being perceived as un-American: Women's Cinema, Black cinema, Chicano cinema, Queer cinema, et al. In order to legitimate themselves, these cinemas must create their own film institutes, stage their own film festivals, and hold their own award ceremonies—duly broadcast on television, of course. But they remain excluded from both Hollywood and the history books that document our *national* cinema.

Let me be clear. The API is not to blame. Founded in 1967, it is a rather late entrant into the picture, as it were. But its list does exemplify a set of deeply held assumptions we have in this country, and within academia, about film history and its relationship to the nation. Still, you cannot roll the dice one hundred times and come up with snake eyes each and every time. And if you do, it means you are rolling loaded dice. You are going through all the gestures of a game of chance, but you are cheating. And if you call the results American film, you are cheating a nation of its history.[2]

In the spirit of exclusion, then, the UCLA Chicano Studies and Research Center is

proud to announce the formation of the Aztlán Film Institute, the other API, if you will. Following the American Film Institute model, we developed a pool from which to make final selections, sending these titles to a blue ribbon panel of some 1,500 leaders from the Aztlán film community, along with President Clinton, Vice-President Gore, and the Taco Bell Chihuahua. As the other but more inclusive API, however, we included films and videos in four categories: documentary, experimental, short or television narrative, and feature film. We also stressed diversity, including male and female, straight and queer, Chicano and a few non-Chicano media artists. After considerable debate, we even included Tejanos. We asked our blue ribbon panel to review our pool of 100 titles and make 100 final selections, ranking them in order of importance. But Aztlán is a strange place and it operates on a different set of rules than the mainstream. If only the pretense of democracy is offered, the citizens of Aztlán will not play along, since that is how most atrocities have been committed in this century. Instead, we received nearly 2500 ballots, since the "community" was bigger than we imagined. Almost all ballots included several dozen write-in candidates, resulting in a group of 149 titles in no particular order. The list is by no means exhaustive. To give just one example, experimental film- and videomakers Harry Gamboa Jr. and Willie Varela have produced nearly 200 titles between them since the early 1970s. Rather, the list presents a provisional sense of a Chicano film and video heritage, one that remains outside the official histories of the American cinema. Below we present the selected titles in chronological order by category. If you have not heard of these titles, or if you do not know where to find them, be sure to ask yourself why. There is an answer.

DOCUMENTARIES

- *I Am Joaquín* (1969) El Teatro Campesino
- *América Tropical* (1971). *Yo Soy Chicano* (1972). *La Raza Unida* (1972). Jesús Salvador Treviño
- *Requiem 29* (1971) David Garcia
- *Cinco Vidas* (1972). *The Unwanted* (1975) José Luis Ruiz
- *Sí Se Puede* (1973) Rick Tejada-Flores. *The Fight in the Fields: César Chávez and the Farmworkers Struggles* (1996) Ray Telles and Rick Tejada-Flores
- *Carnalitos* (1973) Bobby Páramo
- *Cristal* (1974) Severo Pérez
- *Garment Workers* (1975) Susan Racho
- *La onda chicana* (1976) Efraín Gutiérrez
- *Agueda Martinez: Our People, Our Country* (1977) Esperanza Vásquez
- *Chicana* (1979) Sylvia Morales
- *Ballad of an Unsung Hero* (1983) Isaac Artenstein and Paul Espinoza
- *Rag Top Ralph* (1984) Juan Garza.
- *The Lemon Grove Incident* (1986). *Uneasy Neighbors* (1989). *The New Tijuana* (1990) Paul Espinoza
- *Santeros* (1986) Ray Tellez
- *When You Think of Mexico: Commercial Images of Mexico* (1986) Yolanda Lopez
- *No Porque lo Diga Fidel Castro* (1988) Graciela Sanchez
- *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (1988). *El diablo nunca duerme / The Devil Never Sleeps* (1994) Lourdes Portillo
- *Chicano Park* (1988) Marilyn Mulford and Mario Barrera

- *Mi Otro Yo* (1988) Philip and Amy Brookman
- *Mbamba* (1989) Olivia Chumacero
- *Una Lucha Por Mi Pueblo* (1990) Federico Antonio Reade
- *Twenty Years...y que?* (1990) Nancy de los Santos
- *Friday Night Under the Stars* (1990) Rick Leal
- *Los Mineros* (1991) Hector Galan and Paul Espinosa
- *De mujer á mujer* (1993) Beverley Sanchez-Padilla
- *Cholo Joto* (1993) Augie Robles
- *¡Viva 16!* (1994) Valentin Aguirre and Augie Robles
- *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (1996) Four-part documentary series. Executive producer: José Luis Ruiz. Series producer: Hector Galán. Segment producers: Robert Cozens, Hector Galán, Sylvia Morales, Mylene Moreno, and Susan Racho.
- *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* (1997) Laura A. Simon

EXPERIMENTAL

- *My Trip in a 52 Ford* (1966) Ernie Palomino
- *Mozo, or an introduction into the Duality of Orbital Indecision* (1968) Severo Pérez
- *Ghost Town* (1974). *Beckey's Eye* (1975). *April 1977* (1977). *Making is Choosing: A Fragmented Life: A Broken Line: A Series of Observations* (1989). *Reaffirmation* (1990). *Stan and Jane Brakhage* (1980). *Recuerdos de flores muertas* (1982). *Fearless Leader* (1985). *In Progress* (1985). *Juntos en la vida, unidos en la muerte* (1985). *Border Crossing, Versions One and Two* (1988). *A Lost Man* (1992). *Thanksgiving Day* (1993). *In Saturn* (1996) Willie Varela
- *No Movies* (misc., 1975-1978) Harry Gamboa Jr. and Asco. *Cruel Profit* (1975). *Imperfecto* (1983). *Insultan* (1983). *Vaporz* (1984). *Baby Kake* (1984). *Blanx* (1984). *Agent Ex* (1984). *No Supper* (1987). *L.A. Merge* (1991). *El Mundo L.A.: Humberto Sandoval, Actor* (1992). *L.A. Familia* (1993). *Loner With a Gun* (1994). *Fire Ants for Nothing* (1994) Harry Gamboa Jr.
- *Entelequía* (1978) Juan Salazar
- *Mi hermano, mi hambre* (1978) Gustavo Vazquez
- *Night Vigil* (1982) Betty Maldonado
- *Anima* (1989) Frances Salomé España
- *Replies of the Night* (1989) Sandra P. Hahn
- *Crónica de un ser* (1990) S. M. Peña
- *The Idea We Live In* (1990) Pilar Rodriguez
- *Mujería: The Olmeca Rap* (1991) Osa Hidalgo de la Riva
- *Border Brujo* (1991) Isaac Artenstein
- *Slipping Between* (1991) Sandra P. Hahn
- *El Espejo* (1991) Frances Salomé España
- *A History of Violence* (1991) Danny O. Acosta
- *Columbus on Trial* (1992) Lourdes Portillo
- *Ramona: Birth of a Mis*ce*ge*NATION* (1992)
- *Border Swings/ Vaivenes Fronterizos* (1994) Berta Jottar
- *Straight, No Chaser* (1995) Eugene Rodriguez
- *Depression* (1996). *Knife* (1996). *The Body* (1996) Laura Aguilar

SHORT NARRATIVES AND VIDEO NARRATIVES

- *Los Vendidos* (1972). *El Corrido* (1976). *Corridos! Tales of Passion and Revolution* (1987). *La Pastorela: The Shepherds' Tale* (1991) Luis Valdez
- *Guadalupe* (1976) José Luis Ruiz
- *Después del Terremoto/ After the Earthquake* (1979) Lourdes Portillo and Nina Serrano.
- *Vida* (1989) Lourdes Portillo
- *Seguin* (1981) Jesús Salvador Treviño
- *Esperanza* (1985) Sylvia Morales
- *Tormenta* (1985). *Albert Pastor's First Video Project* (1989). *The Royal Family* (1987). *The Trouble with Tonia* (1990) Juan Garza
- *Who Gets to Water the Grass?* (1987) Luis Mesa
- *Esperanza* (1987) Graciela Sanchez
- *Ojos que no ven* (1987) Jose Gutiérrez-Gómez and José Vergelín
- *Face to Face with AIDS* (1988) Socorro Valdez
- *Mi Casa* (1989) Edgar Bravo
- *Distant Water* (1990) Carlos Avila
- *Mi Hermano* (1990) Edgar Bravo
- *Between Friends* (1990) Severo Péez
- *Always Roses* (1990) Luis Avalos and George Figueroa
- *I'll Be Home for Christmas* (1990) Robert Diaz LeRoy
- *The Detour* (1991) Joseph and Raul Tovares
- *The Bike* (1991). *The Pool Party* (1992) Gary Soto
- *Redheads* (1992) Robert Rodriguez
- *Tanto Tiempo* (1992) Cheryl Quintana Leader
- *How Else Am! Supposed to Know I'm Still Alive?* (1993) Evelina Fernández and José Luis Valenzula
- *La Carpa* (1993) Carlos Avila
- *The Ballad of Tina Juarez* (1994) Juan A. Uribe
- *Cruel* (1994) Desi Del Valle
- *Mi Pollo Loco* (1995) Andrew Durham, Rico Martinez and Victor Vargas
- *El Corrido de Cherry Creek* (1995) Gwylym Cano
- *Pretty Vacant* (1996) Jim Mendiola
- *Foto-Novelas* (1997) Four-part dramatic series: "Seeing Through Walls," "In the Mirror," "Mangas," "The Fix." Executive Producer: Carlos Avila. Episode directors: Carlos Avila and A.P. Gonzalez
- *I.N.F.I.T.D. [I'll Not Fall Into the Devil]* (1997) Aldo Velasco

FEATURE FILMS

- *Please Don't Bury Me Alive/ Porfavor, ¡No me entierren vivo!* (1976). *Run, Tecato/Junkie, Run* (1979) Efraín Gutiérrez
- *Raices de sangre* (Mexico, 1977) Jesús Salvador Treviño.
- *Amor chicano es para siempre/ Chicano Love is Forever* (1978) Efrain Gutiérrez
- *Only Once in a Lifetime* (1978) Alejandro Grattan and Moctesuma Esparza.
- *Zoot Suit* (1981). *La Bamba* (1987) Luis Valdez
- *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) Robert Young and Moctesuma Esparza
- *El Norte* (1983).
- *Mi Familia/My Family* (1995) Gregory Nava
- *Heartbreaker* (1984) Frank Zuñiga
- *Born in East L.A.* (1987) Richard "Cheech" Marin

- *Break of Dawn* (1988) Isaac Artenstein
- *Stand and Deliver* (1988) Ramon Menendez
- *Kiss Me a Killer* (1991) Marcus de Leon
- *American Me* (1992) Edward James Olmos
- *El Mariachi* (1992) Robert Rodriguez
- *River Bottom* (1992 and 1994) Robert Diaz LeRoy
- *...and the Earth Did not Swallow Him* (1994) Severo Pérez and Paul Espinosa
- *A Million to Juan* (1994) Paul Rodriguez
- *Painflower* (1995) Fred Garcia
- *Follow Me Home* (1995) Peter Bratt
- *The Big Squeeze* (1996) Marcus de Leon
- *Staccato Purr of the Exhaust* (1996) Luis M. Meza
- *Selena* (1997) Gregory Nava and Moctesuma Esparza

NOTES

1. A case in point is the alternative list by the *LA Weekly* (July 3-9, 1998), which added all of two women filmmakers (Maya Deren and Amy Heckerling), only to receive a letter to the editor the next week complaining about such "PC" inclusion.

2. As we go to press, the Modern Library, a division of Random House, released its own list of the 100 greatest English-language novels. The list featured a scant handful of white women and black men, but no women of color and no Latinos, among other exclusions. It also featured nearly 60 titles published by Random House. Despite the obvious marketing ploy, the list was treated as a cultural event in the mainstream press. For those of us trained in literature, however, the list comes across as a strange hybrid, one that mixes together half-forgotten books from high school and college freshmen courses with popular titles that can only evoke the response, "No, but I saw the movie."

Rather than release our own list, the Aztlan Publications Unit announces a national boycott of Random House. We will focus our attention on two books from the list: James Joyce's *Ulysses* (ranked #1) and *Finnegan's Wake*. If you support our cause, do not buy these books. We already suspect you haven't read them, even if you voted on the list

Chinese and Chinese diaspora cinema

—an introduction

Plural and transnational

by Gina Marchetti

from *Jump Cut*, no. 42, December 1998, pp. 68-72

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In 1986 and 1989, JUMP CUT published two special sections on Chinese cinema. These special sections featured new scholarship on films from the People's Republic of China. At that time, scholarly exchanges between the PRC and the West were becoming more common, which led to an outpouring of research devoted to Chinese film history as well as to contemporary films by the "Fifth Generation" of filmmakers like Chen Kai-ge and Zhang Yi-mou.

Inevitably, any examination of film from the PRC also must conjure up ancillary questions involving Chinese ethnicity, nationalism, colonialism, and sexuality and gender. Claims to "China" and "Chinese-ness" come from the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, various Chinese communities in other parts of Asia (including Singapore, but also Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines) as well as around the globe. As Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu notes in the introduction to his anthology, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*,

"Chinese national cinema can only be understood in its properly transnational context. One must speak of Chinese cinema in the plural and as transnational in the ongoing process of image-making throughout the twentieth century." [1][[open notes in new window](#)]

In his article, "A Nation T(w/o)o: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)," Chris Berry, drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha, looks at the creation of new, hybrid spaces surrounding the "DissemiNation" of Chinese cinema found in films made in the PRC before May-June 1989, in Taiwan after the end of martial law, and in Hong Kong.[2]

Indeed, analyzing "Greater China" and the "global Chinese" has recently had currency in a variety of disciplines (e.g., literature, cultural studies, economics, sociology, and Asian area studies). To Wei-ming advocates the term "Cultural China." [3] This broadly defined concept takes in the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Chinese of the diaspora, and "non-Chinese" who take an interest in China.[4] While To maintains an avowedly conservative, Confucian view of Cultural China, Rey Chow writes from the opposite ideological perspective and cautions against

looking for "authentic" Chinese-ness within a postcolonial world of diaspora and migrancy.[5]

Many of these issues involving Chinese cinema and related questions of ethnic, national, political and other identities circulate within the broader arena of our common era of globalization. As capitalism configures itself transnationally, the relation between the bourgeoisie and the nation-state changes. Class relations become global. New avenues for domination as well as liberation open up with an explosion of international transport, travel and communication via modems and cellular phones.[6] Postmodernism, postcolonialism, and thoughts of transcending the national, the ethnic, and the gendered body prompt a rethinking of struggle based on race, gender, and ethnic-nationalism. This historical moment demands dialectical thinking to navigate within these complexities and develop a radical critique.

NATIONAL/ TRANSNATIONAL

All of the essays collected here look at various configurations of China as a nation. They all also look at China as a divided political, polyglot, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural entity, with dramatic rifts between classes, genders, sexual orientations, etc. Yeh Yueh-yu brings these contradictions between "China" and "Chinese-ness" to the fore in her review of the anthology, *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*. Yeh critiques the book for tacitly assuming a centrality for PRC productions, while subsuming Hong Kong and Taiwan within a cultural, cinematic, and implicitly national-political sphere that does not do justice to the actual history of the region and its various cinema cultures.

The dialectic encompassing China/Taiwan holds a central place in Douglas Kellner's examination of the New Taiwan Cinema of the 1980s. While looking at the cinema in terms of what Fredric Jameson has called "national allegory," Kellner uncovers the complex currents that have come to form contemporary Taiwan as an international anomaly. Taiwan functions as something more than a "renegade province" of the Mainland, something less than the legitimate heir to the rule of the Chinese nation. It finds itself somewhere between a free-floating, postmodern, post-nation and an emerging state looking for international recognition as an autonomous and sovereign nation. Kellner provides an informative history of Taiwanese cinema and a careful examination of the reasons behind the flowering of the New Cinema in the 1980s.

Kellner pays particular attention to the two main auteurs associated with the movement, Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang. Although stylistically and thematically at odds, Hou and Yang, in their respective ways, embody the contradiction in Taiwanese cinema between the national and the transnational. Hou concentrates on rural Taiwan, village life after the Japanese Occupation, and the merging of various Chinese provincial differences where Hakka, Cantonese, and Hokkien dialects of Chinese give way to a common sense of Taiwanese "roots" and a shared language. Yang, on the other hand, is interested in modern Taiwan, in the urban bourgeoisie, in the transnational hybridity that makes European languages drift as easily into Mandarin as the various Chinese dialects merge into Taiwanese for Hou. Using a distinctly modernist style, inspired by Antonioni and other European directors, Yang presents a world of displacement (from either the countryside of Taiwan or the Mainland), disillusionment, disassociation, and

isolation. His cinema contrasts with Hou's unearthing of communal roots. Hou looks for Taiwan as a nation in the island's countryside. Yang looks at the construction of Taiwan as an economic force in the global exchanges of the "rootless" Chinese mercantile and professional classes.

Hu Hsing-chi's article deals with THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS, a series of videos produced in Taiwan to counter the skewed information propagated by the Health Department there on the subject of AIDS/HIV. As Hu quite rightly points out, the public health issues prompted by AIDS/HIV demand a transnational framework, and the video series chooses to look at the issue regionally. Not only are patterns of transmission addressed, bringing up Thailand as a center of the international sex industry and increased travel by the Taiwanese around the world for business, leisure, and education, but also various national policies involving HIV-positive individuals around the region. In this case, Taiwan's policies and social attitudes have a transnational impact, and the series, though primarily playing locally (with the exception of Tsai Ming-liang's entry), has a global dimension.

Anne T. Ciecko and Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu's article on the PRC production, ERMO (directed by Zhou Xiaowen), demonstrates that the film negotiates the "borderless" territory between the local (northern Chinese rural village) and the global (the promise of television and the "world," i.e., U.S. popular culture) via the "national," i.e., Deng's "modernization" of the Chinese economy by creating a "socialist market economy." This essay highlights the importance of women's work as flexible labor within the reconfiguration of the Mainland's economy. Women's labor circulates within established national borders, moving from the rural to the semi-urban and from the "traditional" to the "modern," because of the promise of access to an imagined global prosperity with U.S. consumerist rather than "socialist" characteristics. This examination of ERMO brings out the dialectic between a postmodern, post-national identity and cultural imperialism's further penetration into the Chinese psyche.

CHINESE/CHINESE DIASPORA

Many of the essays collected here deal with an aspect of the Chinese experience that has received increased attention in recent years; i.e., the Chinese experience of dislocation, relocation, emigration, immigration, cultural hybridity, migrancy, exile, and nomadism — together termed the "Chinese diaspora." In addition to the work of To Wei-ming and Rey Chow mentioned above, several recent studies have dealt with the history and implications of the Chinese diaspora. Lynn Pan's *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* and Sterling Seagrave's *Lords of the Rim*, for example, both highlight the economic and political underpinnings of this dispersal of human and other resources.[7] There has been a tendency in recent years in the cinemas of Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as among the "Overseas Chinese" globally, to look at this experience with more critical eyes. Rather than take a "pan-Chinese-ness" as a norm, Taiwanese filmmakers like Hou Hsiao-hsien, working outside the dominant Mandarin cinema, look at the complex waves of Chinese immigration that form a culture distinct from the Mainland.[8]

Hong Kong filmmakers returned to Cantonese language production in the 1980s and 1990s in part to underscore a perspective that positions them differently

within the global China mix. With Hong Kong's reversion to Mainland rule in 1997, underscoring the difference between Hong Kong and the Mainland became more important for filmmakers. Just as Taiwanese filmmakers began to look at the history of Japanese colonialism and the rule of the KMT, Hong Kong New Wave filmmakers began to look more closely at the experiences of economic and political exiles from the Mainland, of the non-Chinese inhabitants of multicultural Hong Kong, and at the experience of roughly 150 years of British colonial rule. The days of commercial Hong Kong cinema's reliance on a pan-Chinese fantasy of an authentic "Chinese-ness" rooted in a common history, language, and ancient culture has given way to two distinct currents of contemporary filmmaking. One strain looks closely at Hong Kong and its inhabitants in Cantonese. The other abandons Hong Kong, for all intents and purposes, to seek the global market for action films, using English or a polyglot hybrid (like Jackie Chan's *RUSH HOUR*, which features various types of English from upper-class British accents to African American slang as well as Cantonese and Mandarin) as the lingua franca.[9]

The two articles on Ann Hui's *SONG OF THE EXILE* featured here (by Tony Williams and Chua Siew-Keng) place the film within that tendency to look at Hong Kong more closely as a specific place within a global context that deviates from the history of the Mainland. Hueyin, the young protagonist of this semi-autobiographical film, travels geographically through England, Hong Kong, Macao, Japan and Guangdong Province in the People's Republic. And, she also travels temporally — through her mother's memories of becoming the Japanese wife of a Nationalist Chinese soldier in Manchuria during the Pacific War to her own experiences of the Mainland during the Cultural Revolution. As the wanderings shown in the film become more widely global, the perspective distills down into something specifically Hong Kong, where the culturally hybrid Hueyin and her Japanese mother Aiko find some sort of "home" in the British colony. Like Ermo and many of the female protagonists of New Taiwan Cinema, Hueyin and Aiko become emblems of movement across borders. Indeed, women often become travelers in these films to symbolize a more general Chinese experience of diaspora, riding economic, political, and social currents of change.

In his essay, Tony Williams carefully places *SONG OF THE EXILE* within Ann Hui's oeuvre. He highlights Hui's interest in issues of displacement and dislocation. And he underscores the importance of this theme in this film as well as in the films and television programs Hui has directed involving the Vietnamese "Boat People." Chua Siew-Keng's essay, complementing Williams' analysis, looks at the film in relation to the historical experience of Han Chinese women within the diaspora, from Chua's own experience of "home" as an Overseas Chinese related to the experiences of Tsai Yen, a 3rd Century B.C. Han Chinese poetess who lived among the "barbarians" of the non-Han Chinese world. Chua problematizes the political nature of "home" and "exile" for women within and outside of the Chinese diaspora. As Chua shows, questions of nation and ethnicity are complicated by the problematic nature of domesticity, femininity, and sexuality.

CHINESE AMERICAN / ASIAN AMERICAN

As the essays float among labels, "Chinese," "Taiwanese," "Hong Kong," "Overseas Chinese," "Chinese exiles," "diasporic Chinese," "Chinese emigrants," "Chinese American," the positions various filmmakers take, coming from geographically and

ideologically distant locations, begin to underscore the tremendous complexity and contradictory quality of "Chinese" cinema globally. Peter Feng deals with many of these issues of location in his article on Felicia Lowe's, Lisa Hsia's, and Richard Fung's documentaries on traveling to the People's Republic of China as adults to look for their families' histories. As travel to China from the United States and Canada became possible in the late 1970s and increasingly common throughout the 1980s, documentaries about family reunions, trips to ancestral villages, and other explorations of China by Chinese American tourists, students, teachers, and other cultural workers also began to appear.

Many of these film and video makers used the camera as both a tool of exploration, a way to make contact, and as a mechanism for maintaining distance, of separating themselves from the often alien and alienating aspects of China. Layers of individual identity come to the fore as the relations between the filmmakers and their parents, distant relatives, family histories, cross-cultural expectations, and personal feelings about being Chinese Americans develop in these transnational visits. A generation removed from immigration, these media makers' works take up as salient themes complex relations between Chinese identity, the cultural hybridity of the Chinese diaspora, and the political necessities of an Asian American sense of self. Not only part of the Chinese diaspora, these film and video makers also partake of the flowering of Asian American film culture over the last twenty years.

When looked at as culturally "Chinese," these Asian American and Canadian travel documentaries seem to highlight certain issues involving that experience of family ties and emigration from the Mainland. However, when placed within the tradition of Asian American documentary making, a new set of relations come to the fore — involving anti-Asian racism and U.S. immigration laws, pressures to assimilate within a white-defined mainstream coupled with the facts of anti-Asian violence and discrimination as part of the American experience. Here, the lives of Chinese American filmmakers diverge from those of other Overseas Chinese and, particularly, from those working within Hong Kong and Taiwan. While emigration, exile, hybridity, and migrancy may be common themes, there is another political dimension to these Asian American documentary works that Feng clearly highlights in his article.[10]

GAY ASIA ON CHINESE SCREENS

One of the most dramatic changes to take place within transnational Chinese screen culture over the last two decades has involved the representation of gays and lesbians in the cinema. While homosexuality has a place within Chinese cultural history,[11] the various modern governments that claim China have very strictly enforced anti-homosexual policies. Given the censorship regulations of the People's Republic, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Hong Kong, and the various nations that have significant populations of Chinese film viewers (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia, etc.), it is not surprising that Chinese commercial filmmakers have not been able to deal with gay and lesbian issues in the past. However, several factors have changed this recently. Taiwan has significantly changed its censorship laws, and, now, gay subject matter has found its way into entertainment films like Ang Lee's *THE WEDDING BANQUET* as well as into works by cutting-edge filmmakers like Tsai Ming-Liang.

Tsai's contribution to the Red Ribbons series is discussed in Mu's article. Unlike the other videos in the series, Tsai's entry received international attention and appeared in several gay and lesbian film festivals around the world. Certainly part of the interest in Tsai's work comes from his established critical reputation, but the increased global visibility of gay and lesbian filmmakers must also be included as a contributing factor. Gay and lesbian liberation has a transnational dimension, and Tsai's look at Asian gays with AIDS/HIV satisfies an interest in both the treatment of gays around the world and in transnational public health issues.

Worldwide, independent filmmakers like Chinese Canadian Richard Fung (discussed in Peter Feng's article) have used their own experiences as gay Asians to portray sexual relations in direct terms. Fung is part of a growing number of Asian American filmmakers who are exploring racism within the gay/lesbian community and homophobia within the Asian American community.

Hong Kong filmmakers are often criticized for their conservative treatment of sexuality, because of the commercial nature of the industry and the importance of their films' salability in even more conservative places like Singapore and Malaysia. This, too, has been changing, with films like *A QUEER STORY*, *HOLD ME TIGHT*, and *HAPPY TOGETHER* winning international recognition. Prominent filmmakers like Stanley Kwan have "come out" and now address their own sexuality openly within their films.

However, as "greater" China has been warming up to frank treatments of gay and lesbian themes, the People's Republic of China has even stricter controls on the film industry as a consequence of the events of May-June 1989 in Tian'anmen Square. Because of this crackdown, though, some talented filmmakers have found a way to work independently outside the government controlled studio system. The transnational co-production, *FAREWELL MY CONCUBINE*, by Chen Kai-ge may come immediately to mind, since it did receive limited release in the United States and is available on video. However, this film, which has been decried by many critics as homophobic, does not represent the only work dealing with homosexuality in China to receive international critical attention. *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* by Zhang Yuan is a dramatic breakthrough in the silence surrounding the lives of gay men in the People's Republic. As Chris Berry points out in his article on the film, *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* seems to come from a dramatic tradition associated with the plays of Jean Genet and some of the films of Fassbinder. The film creates a highly theatrical presentation of a gay man's encounter with a policeman in the bathroom of a Chinese park as a metaphor for more general relations of power. Minimal and stylistically daring, the film takes chances in depicting gay life and also criticizing government authoritarianism and its impact on the psyche.

CONCLUSION

If nothing else, this collection of articles puts established definitions of Chinese cinema into question. As transnational productions become more common, questions of politics and nationalism, particularly involving Hong Kong and Taiwan, continue to strain against a facile leap to an imagined "Greater China." However, the common experiences of the Chinese diaspora and the global links among various Chinese communities must not be dismissed. Particularly for those who traditionally may be at odds with a conservative Chinese patriarchy, such as

many heterosexual women, lesbians, and gay men, the ability to cross borders and to participate in a wider, global sphere transcends ethnic and cultural ties. The contradictions surrounding the label of "Chinese cinema" call for a truly dialectical film criticism. These articles provide excellent examples of critical thinkers engaging these political, social, and cultural complexities.

NOTES

1. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "Historical Introduction: Chinese Cinemas (1896-1996) and Transnational Film Studies," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, edited by Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), p.3.
2. Chris Berry, "'A Nation T(w/o)o: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)," *East-West Film Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 1993), pp. 24-51.
3. To Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," in *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*, edited by Tu Wei-ming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 1-34.
4. For a critique of Tu's Confucianism and an examination of Confucianism and Chinese identity in Zhang's *JU DOU*, see W.A. Callahan, "Gender, Ideology, Nation: *JU DOU* in the Cultural Politics of China," *East-West Film Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 1993), pp. 52-80.
5. Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
6. For more on the cultural and cinematic consequences of these changes, see John Hess and Patricia R. Zimmermann, "Transnational Documentaries: A Manifesto," *Afterimage* (January/February 1997), pp. 10-14.
7. Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (New York: Kodansha International, 1990).
8. Sterling Seagrave, *Lords of the Rim* (London: Corgi, 1996). Hong Kong cinema has traditionally relied on its "pan-Chinese-ness" and suppression of a uniquely Hong Kong voice to make money within the lucrative Overseas Chinese markets. Gigi T.Y. Hu implies that Hong Kong filmmakers' absorption in their own identity wrapped up in the issues surrounding the 1997 reversion to Mainland sovereignty may partially explain the dramatic drop in popularity of Hong Kong films among the Overseas Chinese in recent years. Hong Kong filmmakers seem to be out of touch with the global Chinese entertainment markets. See Gigi T.Y. Hu, "Reaction to Hong Kong-made Films in Southeast Asia: Some Observations," *Media Asia*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1998), pp.98-101. See also Grace Leung and Joseph Chan, "The Hong Kong Cinema and its Overseas Market: A Historical Overview, 1950-1995," *Fifty Years of Electric Shadows*, edited by Law Kar (Hong Kong: 21st Hong Kong International Film Festival, the Urban Council, 1997), pp. 143-51.
9. For more on Hong Kong filmmakers abroad, see Steve Fore, "Home, Migration, Identity: Hong Kong Film Workers Join the Chinese Diaspora," *Fifty Years of Electric Shadows*, edited by Law Kar (Hong Kong: 21st Hong Kong International

Film Festival, the Urban Council, 1997), pp. 130-135.

10. See Peter Feng's other important articles on Asian American film culture: Peter Feng, "Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: CHAN IS MISSING," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Summer 1996), pp. 88-118; Peter Feng, "In Search of Asian American Cinema," *Cineaste*, Vol. 21, Nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1995), p. 32ff.

11. See Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

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New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics Defining "Chinese"

by Yeh Yueh-yu

from *Jump Cut*, no. 42, December 1998, pp. 73-76

copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1998, 2006

New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics. Ed. Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, Esther Yau. Cambridge University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-521-44409-8, hard cover, \$56.95

For people who are interested in Chinese-language cinema, *New Chinese Cinemas* is a valuable book. It not only provides the cultural and political basics but also combines formal and sociopolitical analyses. It is especially welcome to film studies and East Asian cultural studies, given the lack of literature in the field and a growing interest in Chinese-language cinema.

New Chinese Cinemas anthologizes papers presented at a conference entitled "Cinema and Social Change in Three Chinese Societies" held at UCLA in 1990. Over seven years has passed since the conference. If many of the articles seem dated, it testifies to rapidly changing cultural politics in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the PRC. Selecting nine out of 21 papers from the conference, the book is divided into two parts: 1) Films in the People's Republic and 2) Films in Taiwan and Hong Kong. While Part I shows a consistent and intertwined methodological approach, Part 2 only sporadically addresses the connections between identity, politics, and style in Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinema.

The articles on PRC film give a clear blueprint of the changing relations between cinema spectators and cultural identity. Ma Ning's essay discusses Xie Jin's melodramas with respect to traditional ethics, political change, and female subjectivity. He argues that the social and ideological crises experienced by Chinese subjects in the post-Mao era, what he calls the "new period," can be seen in the films' spatial positioning of female characters. In his essay, Nick Browne proposes "political melodrama" to replace the conventional term "family melodrama." Using the term "political melodrama," Browne argues, has two main benefits. One, Western scholars would then emphasize the previously neglected, socio-political aspect of melodrama; second, they would make the term "melodrama" more accurately describe PRC cinema. Chris Berry discusses why it is impossible to designate a single, unifying spectatorial position in reform-era PRC films. The coherent viewing subject typical of classical Chinese cinema disappears from the films of this period. Berry suggests that this change is due to changing relations between the individual and the socialist system. Paul Pickowicz concentrates on

urban films, noting especially Huang Jianxin's works, to demonstrate the changing politics and aesthetic forms in PRC films of the 1980s, a period he calls post-socialist. By locating the analysis in the conjunction between cinematic and political development, these articles provide a clear picture of PRC films in historical transition. But this kind of methodological rigor fails to appear in the essays on Taiwanese and Hong Kong films.

English-language film studies treat Taiwanese cinema and, to some extent, Hong Kong cinema as subgroups of Chinese (or China's) cinema. The idea seems to come from a generally accepted notion that culturally speaking, Taiwan and Hong Kong are inseparable parts of China. Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinema, as a result, are treated as parts of Chinese cinema or perhaps different kinds of Chinese cinema. This is the case in Esther Yau's article entitled "'China' in World Cinema since 1945," in Chris Berry's (ed.) *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*. Without exception, *New Chinese Cinemas* also shows an adherence to the imperial national conception of "Middle Kingdom" (zhongguo),^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) which the authors also extend to the treatment of Taiwan and Hong Kong culture, including the development of the respective cinemas.

The above works all use the term "Chinese cinema" in either a singular or plural form to include Chinese-language films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China without bothering to qualify the problematic nature of the term itself. When we speak of a certain national cinema, the classifying adjective usually comes from the name of the country. For example, "French cinema" means cinema of or made by French people. But the term goes further than naming nationality. It also denotes the linguistic, cultural, social, and formal codes that can be recognized as something called French. This concept of national cinema provides at least two meanings to attribute to "Chinese cinema." It indicates "cinema of China" (zhongguo dianying) as well as "cinema with certain Chinese linguistic and cultural qualities." The term so defined certainly does cover mainland Chinese films since 1905 when the first Chinese film, *DINGJUNSI-AN*, (a Peking opera documentary) was made by Chinese in Beijing. It does not, however, appropriately cover Hong Kong and Taiwanese cinema.

Chinese-language cinema was born in Shanghai and Beijing in the first decade of the century. However, over a hundred years of political fractures, ideological oppositions, and contrasting economic systems have separated the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This history has formed quite distinctive national cinemas within each territory. Western scholars have tried to redefine "China" as "three Chinas," but this modification cannot encompass Hong Kong and Taiwanese cinema. On the other hand, recent Chinese publications in Hong Kong and Taiwan have been striving to modify the ambivalent term "Chinese cinema" by suggesting a counter-hegemonic perspective to study the three cinemas. Some have begun to replace Chinese cinema with "Chinese-language" cinema (zhongwen dianying or huayu dianying) as a more accurate term that would not privilege any one of the three cinemas. However, it functions more as an ad hoc term. As this interpretation has only begun to gain popularity and validity in many Chinese articles, it is hardly addressed in the most recent English books on the subject. Accordingly, *New Chinese Cinema* is dated not just chronologically, but it also suffers from a wide-eyed sense of "discovery" that tends to homogenize its objects, neglecting the films' more immediate socio-historical background in favor of their "Chinese" status.

In the introduction to the book, the editor addresses the "paradox" of conducting cross-cultural analysis between Chinese texts and Western critical theory: For a Western audience, the presentation of essays on Chinese cinema of the 1980s implies a distance of both culture and interpretation. This distance for film scholars may have a paradoxical aspect — disclosing a fascinating spectacle of another world under a familiar form of analysis. For scholars of Chinese history and literature, a book that takes Chinese film as a central instance of popular culture — one, moreover, that approaches its object through the languages of Western critical theory — may seem novel and strange (Browne 1).

Here a Western theorist most clearly dissociates himself from "the other" in Chinese cinema. Instead of dealing with the "paradoxical" condition's perplexities, the author retains a dichotomy between the fascinating, native "other" and the critical, analytical "us."

Thus, the act of expressing difficulty in cross-cultural reading becomes a posture. It does not try to bridge the gap of cross-cultural analysis. This failure shows in an interpretation of China which depends upon the official ideology proffered by both regimes across the Taiwan Straits. The reigning parties in Taiwan and mainland China have both insisted on the "One-China" policy for different political purposes. The Nationalists in Taiwan have to stick to the policy to 1) prevent any official statement of an independent Taiwan which, as a result, would provoke military invasion from the mainland, and 2) maintain their "legitimate" rule in Taiwan. The opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party, is partially constituted by a hardcore nativism that demands a Taiwan ruled only by Taiwanese with a Taiwanese, not Chinese, national identity. Hence, what we see in the figuration of "China" is a political and cultural definition constructed out of a Manichaean political struggle between the Nationalist and the Communist Party since 1949:

"'China' appears today largely as the consequence of the 1949 Communist revolution, forming an interregional social and economic network defined and sustained by politics...Yet to exaggerate these differences would be to overlook a common cultural tradition of social, ideological, and aesthetic forms that stands behind and informs Chinese cinema as a whole. This book locates the Chinese cinemas of the Peoples' Republic of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong between the elements of a common culture and the differences of form and significance wrought by history and political division" (Browne 1).

This reminds me of the official statement repeatedly made by the PRC government on its One-China policy. While it is true that to some extent, the Chinese in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan still share some common cultural and historical experiences, the emphasis on the premise of common culture tends to homogenize the others.

Given the forced separation of Hong Kong and Taiwan by colonialism (Britain and Japan respectively) in the last century, both areas have developed a different identity that cannot be explained simply as Chinese. The departure from the "orthodox" Chinese identity reached its peak in the 1980s. Why then does this book, with such historical knowledge in mind, still attempt to map out the three cinemas by using tools that ignore the wide differences dividing them? A possible

explanation for the persistence of this tendency could be summarized in the following hypotheses: a) an assumption that there is some homogeneity existing in the three cinemas, that as a result, invites a unifying discourse; b) a hope of generating an all-inclusive discourse to "illuminate" the homogeneity and, in turn, reinforce the official statement that there is after all, only one China. Therefore, even though it is not difficult for Western audiences, Western film distributors, and overseas Chinese-speaking audiences to differentiate films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China, these film scholars seem more inclined to diffuse the differences and confuse their readers.

This homogenizing tendency is seen in discussions of Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinema. Most of the articles are conducted from the perspective of the taken-for-granted centers (mainland China and the First World) rather than the margins. Papers on Hong Kong all center around Hong Kong's complex and difficult reunion with China. China is thus the configuration of "the return of the father" in Li Cheuk-to's essay, the motherland in Esther Yau's delineation of a syncretic identity in late colonial Hong Kong, and the reference to ahistorical representations of the real historical instances in Leo Ou-fan Lee's discussion of popular films.

These articles constitute a Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s defined solely by an identity crisis: Hong Kong is portrayed as a rich, corrupt child caught in a custody fight against her greedy bi-cultural parents. While it is ignorant to deny the relevance of the 1997 issue in the Hong Kong cultural imagination of the 1980s, it is equally fallacious to overlook at how Hong Kong cinema is determined by elements and traditions evolved in the course of its film history since 1913. Regrettably, here teleological determination overruns actual history. The critics write as if Hong Kong cinema is so haunted by 1997's ghost that immediate, current factors have no power to speak and be seen in the films.

Genre films of the 1980s have managed to talk back to the undesirable and tyrannical "parents" in various ways. Horror and ghost films express rebellion by means of entertaining, highly stylized, fantastic forms. Supposedly ahistorical representations in costume and martial arts films articulate a Hong Kong identity that is not only historical but aggressively metropolitan, capitalist, late colonial, and anti-hegemonic. The films' syncretic nature, suggested by Esther Yau, cannot be confused with a simplified opposition between capitalism and socialism, between modernization and pre-modern nostalgia. In fact, their syncretism epitomizes the emergence of a concrete Hong Kong identity that tries to represent itself in a self-reflexive, self-parodying, and self-affirmative way.

The center manifests itself again in the essays on Taiwanese cinema. William Tay's discussion of Hou Hsiao-hsien's films shows a nice textual reading in light of cross-disciplinary analysis. He situates the recurring theme of initiation in the context of Taiwan's postwar socioeconomic changes. Yet, given Hou's importance in Taiwanese cinema, a textual analysis based on initiation themes fails to connect Hou's oeuvre with the cinema's history, politics, and movements, and with the New Cinema in particular.

As a matter of fact, Hou began his career as the assistant to Li Hsing, a veteran director attacked by critics trained in Western film theory for his conservative ethical values. The first three films that Hou made before *THE SANDWICH MAN* were melodramas influenced by modernization projects, literary movements, and

diplomatic catastrophes of the late 1970s. Hou's emphasis on rural life, family, and traditional ethics therefore has a link with films of the late 1970s, when a conservative Taiwanese identity was about to emerge in a period of gradual historical, political, and social transformation. This, in part, continued to influence the New Cinema of the 1980s, particularly in its vision of a postwar Taiwanese history slightly different from the Nationalists' version. This project of writing history is consciously woven into every new film.

Therefore, the absence or cancellation of the father figure as pointed out by Tay, is not merely a fixture in Hou's films but is also a favorite metaphor in both Edward Yang's and Wan Jen's films. The waning father is not, as Tay suggests, subversive only on a textual level. Instead, there is a correspondence between the decline of domestic patriarchal power and the rise of a middle class. A sea-change in social mores surged because of struggles for a measure of economic security. This security came at the price of instituting an authoritarian national government and martial law. Tay's neglect of a larger scope for dealing with cinematic and critical politics consigns Hou's films to a corner of outdated Western lit-crit topography.

In Fredric Jameson's article, the "discovery" of a modernist resurgence in the postmodern "Third World" Taipei is another example of a Third World text inexplicably popping up in the agenda of an evolved First World critical perspective, i.e., North America and Western Europe. While Jameson celebrates a Taiwanese film in the postmodern geopolitical map, the appraisal simultaneously divorces the significance of the film from the context of Taiwan. As informed by Jameson's intertextual reading of *THE TERRORIZERS*, Edward Yang's films are attuned to European high modernism. Yang's films have always been known for their tangled connections with the First World — manifested in modernist techniques *à la* Antonioni and Godard, cultural expressions like a love of rock'n'roll music, and themes such as the derogatory handling of urban space and critique of industrial civilization. Yang's practice of high European modernism, therefore, reveals a poignant post-colonial condition in Taiwan.

This post-coloniality is two-fold. On the one hand, Yang's attachment to modernist form represents a cultural phenomenon of the 1960s and the 1970s when modernism was worshipped in Taiwan's intellectual circles. During that time, there was no opportunity to practice modernism in commercial film. The incorporation of modernism into Taiwan cinema was only possible in the early 1980s when the film industry urgently needed revitalization. On the other hand, Yang deliberately chooses modernist techniques as an effective form to articulate a post-colonial, self-reflexive hybridity.

The choice of modernism shows the complexity and irony in the cinematic reflections of a nation. One should caution against simplistically equating modernist forms in Third World cinema with European modernism when these forms may have a different signification. Just as the boundary between the First and the Third is not easily transgressed (any non-American permanent resident can describe how tedious it is to pass the immigration inspection at major U.S. airports), a critique of Taiwan's neocolonial history should not be undermined in the re-mapping of a "Third World" city/ nation from a Western cosmopolitan perspective.

The book's all-encompassing scope also produces shoddy research on Taiwanese

cinema in its Chinese bibliography. English writings on Taiwanese cinema are rare, but since the book includes Chinese sources from the PRC and Hong Kong, it is surprising that only two book entries from Taiwan are included.[2] In fact, Taiwan's major film journal, *Film Appreciation*, has published many important articles on the New Cinema in the 1980s, and it is still regularly organizing special topics on themes such as the representation of Taiwan's aborigines, documentary film, colonial cinema, etc. The Film Archive has conducted research on Hokkien (the Chinese dialect spoken by the majority of people in Taiwan) films of the 1950s and the 1960s as well as projects on early Taiwanese film. Another important intellectual journal *Contemporary* constantly publishes scholarly articles on PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan films. One wonders whether lack of access or lack of interest makes the book's editors presume that there is no film studies in Taiwan. Ironically, one can easily find writings on Taiwan in mainland China's publications.

Such an oversight ties in with the book's ignorance of how many aspects of cultural production in Hong Kong and Taiwan deal with the reconstruction of identity. If one examines Tsui Hark's works beyond superficially accusing them of cynicism, one finds in them the articulation of an identity and an interpretation of Chinese history from a specific colonial subject position without apology. Tsui Hark's *SWORDSMAN* series (*SWORDSMAN*, *SWORDSMAN II*, *EAST IS RED*), and the series about the legendary martial arts master Huang Fei-hong (*ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA I*, *II*, *III*, and *IV*) have clearly expressed a national and cultural identity based on revised interpretations of historical incidents and ambivalence toward cultural essentialism.

Since the mid 1980s, historians in Taiwan have begun to redefine the relation between Taiwan and China from an activist/ nativist perspective. In many cultural fields, the debate on what constitutes a legitimate Taiwanese identity has been a fervent topic. To defend Taiwanese identity does not mean, as many would argue, purely ideological opposition-conventionalized as capitalist vs. socialist — but contesting national concepts between the monolithic and the plural. Yet New Chinese Cinemas seems unaware of these new developments.

In the current relations between Hong Kong and the PRC as well as between Taiwan and the PRC, China remains an oppressive political entity. This can be judged from the PRC's uncompromising attitudes toward the Hong Kong Chinese regarding the 1997 issue and constant interference in Taiwan's international relations.[3] On the other hand, in order to reinforce the "One-China" policy, the term "Chinese" has become loaded with cultural chauvinism, and this is apparent in studies on the two margins by PRC scholars. With China's continual chauvinistic attitude to Hong Kong and Taiwan, scholarship in Chinese-language cinema (*zhongwen dianying*) should resist the imposition of China's (*zhongguo de*) hegemony upon the margins.

NOTES

The Chinese translation of this essay appeared in the Taiwanese journal *Film Appreciation* 26.2 (1996): 75-86. Special thanks to Darrell W. Davis, David E. James, and Gina Marchetti for their helpful comments.

1. The concept of empire in Chinese history can be traced back to the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C.) when Qinshihuang established a unified Chinese empire. Since then, the

conception of the "Middle Kingdom" has been constituted by three components, namely, unification, standardization and centralization. Although the imperial structure was terminated by the Republican revolution in 1911, the three defining concepts have not lost their vitality in the later communist administration. The military invasion of Tibet, centralized policy on governing the ethnic minorities, and its claims of sovereignty on Taiwan and Hong Kong are, in fact, manifestations of the central ideas of the traditional empire.

2. The two books are *Taiwan tin dianying* [*Taiwanese New Cinema*] and *Xianggang dianyingfengmao* [*Hong Kong Cinema*], edited by Taiwanese film critic, Chiao Hsiung-ping.

3. The examples are numerous. In the summer of 1994, due to PRC government pressure, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked Taiwan's President Li Teng-hui not to go to the opening ceremony of the 1994 Asian Games held in Hiroshima, Japan. The most recent and well-known instance is Li's visit in the United States to give a speech at Cornell University. See "Cornell's Reunion is China's Nightmare: China fumes over a private U. S. visit by Taiwan's leader to his old school" by James Walsh, *Time*, June 5, 1995.

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Ermo

Televisuality, capital and the global village

by Anne T. Ciecko and Sheldon H. Lu

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Although set in a small village in northern China, Zhou Xiaowen's 1994 film *ERMO* provides a road map of the processes of globalization and capital accumulation in the Deng era's economic reform. Vis-à-vis a deceptively simple narrative centered around a Chinese peasant woman, Ermo, and her struggle to acquire the biggest TV set in the county to outdo her neighbor, Zhou represents "televisuality" as the ultimate dream and paradox of China's collective national agenda of modernization and globalization.[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

In this essay, our analysis of the film will focus on several main levels. First, as typical of Fifth-Generation directors, it appears that *ERMO* still adopts a lingering, residual ethnographic approach to the subject of "China." The film's representation of the rural, primitive, and exotic partakes of the self-orientalizing strategy of the previous master texts of China's New Cinema. Second, at the core of the filmic narrative is a contemporary setting against the backdrop of economic reform and capital/ capitalist accumulation, and the film uses this setting to offer a critique of the Deng era national agenda of modernization. Nevertheless, the self-reflexive critique of the Chinese nation is accomplished by way of gender politics and libidinal dynamics. Third, the story of the acquisition of a huge color TV set in a remote Chinese village can be read as an apt allegory of global televisuality in the postmodern era of electronic simulacra. *ERMO* diegetically foregrounds the interrelated issues of ownership and spectatorship. The film forcefully stages the contradictions, ironies, and uneven cultural formations between the local and the global, the native and the foreign. It is no coincidence that these layers of analysis correspond to the three basic levels of social, technological, and cultural formation in contemporary China: the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern. The co-existence of these non-synchronous, heterogeneous elements in the same space and time is a marker of the profound unevenness and hybridity of the (post)modernity of a "post-Third-World," post-socialist country such as China.[2]

ERMO is centered around the quest of the title character, played by the Mongolian actress, Alia. Married to a sick, frail, and apparently impotent man who was once the village chief, Ermo is now the family breadwinner who supports her husband

and young son, Tiger. By night, she kneads dough into twisty noodles and hangs them up to dry; by day, she hawks her wares in the village. The first image of Ermo shows her as a noodle-seller crouching on the street with bunches of twisty noodles bound with red paper. Her cry of "mai mahua mian lou!" ("twisty noodles for sale!") is repeated like a refrain throughout the film and echoed by the music.

Industrious, resourceful, and stubbornly determined, Ermo is fueled by jealous competition with her lazy neighbor (nicknamed "Fat Woman"), who owns a television set. The neighbor's husband, Xiazi (nicknamed "Blindman"), an energetic entrepreneur, is the richest man in the village. The perpetual rivalry between Ermo and Xiazi's wife intensifies, and they taunt each other about their husbands' virility and their abilities to produce sons (Xiazi and his wife have a daughter). Ermo secretly poisons her neighbor's pig in revenge. Frequently humiliated by the lack of a television set at home and by Tiger's mealtime excursions next door to watch his favorite shows, Ermo vows to buy an even bigger television set.

She begins to accept rides from Xiazi into town, first to sell her hand-woven baskets and noodles at the street market. Later, she begins an affair with Xiazi, starts to work at the town restaurant, and temporarily moves away from her family. Motivated by the goal of earning enough money to buy the biggest television set in town, Ermo also sells her blood at a hospital, and works herself to exhaustion. Realizing that Xiazi has subsidized her restaurant wages, Ermo reacts defiantly by paying him back the extra money and breaking off the relation. Despite his wife's suspicions and rage, Xiazi sees to it that the wife does not learn of his fling with Ermo. After she finally has enough money to buy the television set, Ermo and her reunited family and neighbors bring it back to the village, but she is too fatigued to enjoy her triumph.

SIGNATURES OF "CHINA" IN GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

From 1986 to the present, Zhou has directed some ten films, ranging from war film, thriller, detective, melodrama, to historical epic. However, ERMO is the only film released to the U.S. audience. Unique among the Fifth Generation, Zhou was first known as a highly successful director of urban films. His detective thrillers, DESPERATION (Zuihou de fengkuang, 1987) and THE PRICE OF FRENZY (Fengkuang de daijia, 1988), and melodrama, THE IMPULSE OF YOUTH (Qingchun chongdong, 1992), were box-office hits in China's domestic market. He was thought to have a knack for combining the skill of commercial success and the vision of art cinema. Yet, some of his more experimental films such as the war story IN THEIR PRIME (Tameng zheng nianqing, 1986) and the historical/ allegorical work THE BLACK MOUNTAIN ROAD (Heishan lu, 1989) were never released to the Chinese public due to the vagaries of censorship. Despite his reputation within China, he was little known in the global film market.[3]

ERMO is Zhou's first work on a rural subject, as well as the film that brought him instant international recognition. The director was forced to change his style and subject to face the reality and politics of global entertainment. China has a long tradition of urban-based films dating back to at least the 1930s, yet the international art film market currently favors "primitive" rural films on the subject of mainland China.[4] Apart from being a masterfully made film, ERMO signifies what a Western audience understands and accepts as "China." ERMO's cinematic

gaze fixes on China's backward interior, and the director assumes in part a strategy of national allegory. Such a self-orientalizing, ethnographic approach has proven successful in the international film market.[5]

Furthermore, Zhou joins other leaders of China's New Cinema such as Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and Tian Zhuangzhuang in the formation of what we call a "transnational Chinese cinema." [6] Their works partake of a transnational network of the manufacture, exhibition, marketing, distribution, and consumption of "Chinese" films. (As a matter of fact, ERMO was funded by mainlanders-turned-Hong Kong businessmen in the final production stage. They also funded the production of his next film *THE EMPEROR'S SHADOW* [Qin song, 1995]). New Chinese Cinema as such orientalizes and exoticizes itself for the world market, and thus it follows a trend in transnational cinema all over the world.[7]

In terms of the politics and practices of representation, ERMO, based on a 1992 novella by Xu Baoqi, largely recognizes and participates in the marketing of consumable symbols of rural "Third World" China through the reworking of images of regionalism, primitivism, and exoticism which have become paradigmatic and symptomatic of the Fifth Generation — and intrinsic to global conceptions and receptions of Chinese art cinema. For example, consider one of the most striking and fetishistic examples of "Chinese" rituals — foot massage, employed by Zhang Yimou in *RAISE THE RED LANTERN*. In ERMO, there is a unique and knowing combination of appetites as the film showcases Ermo's distinctive and erotically-charged making of noodles with her feet.

As in other Fifth Generation films, frequent long shots linger on the village and the surrounding landscape, particularly the dusty ridges of earth into which crude roads have been cut. In ERMO, the eccentric "local color" of everyday peasant life is shown. For example, Ermo's noodles are hung out to dry like the vibrantly dyed cloths of *JU DOU* or the bright, red chili peppers of *THE STORY OF QIU JU*. The film is also enlivened with the traditional Chinese festivities of the spring festival, fireworks, carnivalistic displays, folk arts (paper cuts, etc.). ERMO also shares with many films from the same period a focus on the screen image of Chinese women. More broadly, the film bears a striking similarity to a group of films produced in the 80s and 90s such as *IN THE WILD MOUNTAINS* (Yeshan, 1985), *THREE WOMEN* (Nüren de gushi, 1986), and *WOMEN FROM THE LAKE OF SCENTED SOULS* (Xianghun nü, 1993). These films all deal with issues and images of gender, peasant women, rural life, and modernization in the Deng era.

The most notable connection between Zhang and Zhou's films is a parallel to *THE STORY OF QIU JU*, which was commented upon by many reviewers of ERMO. There is the obvious intertextuality in terms of casting: The character of Xiazi (Blindman) in ERMO is portrayed by the same actor (Liu Peiqi) who plays Qiu Ju's husband; Ermo's husband is portrayed by the same actor (Ge Zhijun) who plays Officer Li in *THE STORY OF QIU JU*. In terms of tone and genre, both films are melodramatic/comic hybrids, with absurdist contemporary social realism. Each of their narratives centers significantly around the figure of a Chinese peasant woman and her single-minded mission. However, in the former film, Qiu Ju seeks retribution for the assault to her husband's masculinity, and ultimately, the restoration of the village community as extended family. ERMO, on the other hand, problematizes the title character's roles in the nexus of social

relations — as wife, mother, and neighbor. Ermo's motives are not justice or loyalty, but naked greed, as she is willing to work herself nearly to death to achieve her goal. In both films, the women's ambitions lead them to make regular trips from the rural village into town, necessitating a clash with forces of modernization in the respective forms of government bureaucracy and free market economy.

Capital accumulation was euphemistically known in Deng's China as "socialism with Chinese characteristics," or "socialist market economy." Zhou uses the site of the rural community to provide a context for the inevitable cultural disruptions caused by modernization, as well as picturesque images, which participate in cinematic "ethnographic" strategies. The title character of Ermo, forced to support her family, serves as an agency to reflect these tensions. Indeed, the village *dramatis personae* seem rather ironically topological: Ermo's husband (the "Chief"), "Blindman," his wife "Fat Woman," even Ermo's young son "Tiger" who will continue the family line. Their names point to key personality traits — powerlessness, capitalist myopia, endless consumption, and aggression.

In Deng's China, television became "a symbol of the success of the national modernization." [8] Fittingly, television becomes the object of Ermo's quest. Ermo's desire for the 29-inch television set is spurred by consumer one-upmanship, but it also humorously underscores the inadequacy of the available models of masculinity. The biggest TV set is intended to replace the dysfunctional phallus of her husband, the ex-village chief, in the symbolic order.

THE LIBIDINAL ECONOMY, GENDER POLITICS, AND CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

ERMO unsettles gender politics by recognizing the relation between money and power, satirizing conventional notions of masculinity and femininity, and revealing the corrupting influence of western popular culture. Gender roles are switched. This is demonstrated through the dialogue, as well as visual representation. Ermo's husband, at one point, asks her, "Why can't you act like a woman?" She retorts, "Why can't you act like a man?" (Although her husband repeatedly advises her that a house is a chicken, and a television set is an egg, the emerging modern Ermo rejects his folk wisdom.) Ermo fulfills her roles as wife and mother in a perfunctory manner. Instead, her central motivation and values come from a spirit of competition, which is at odds with traditional notions of femininity. In ERMO, capitalist entrepreneurship is inextricably linked with catalytic, paradoxical effects on the dynamics of male/female relations and sexual exchange.

The film employs ironic juxtapositions to illustrate this relation between entrepreneurship and sexual politics. Initially, Ermo's manner of capital accumulation is ostensibly rather primitive and premodern, as she prepares twisty noodles in her home to sell at the street market of the county town. Without her steely determination and high energy, her husband is unable to do any heavy manual work. Their neighbor, Xiazi, his wife, and their daughter, appear to offer the exact asymmetry in libidinal, physical, and economic conditions. As the richest man in the village, Xiazi owns a truck, and thrives on his trade between the village and the town — although he tells Ermo, "Money's no use without a son." His wife stays at home and plays the role of the domestic housekeeper, albeit one who is most often seen munching pickled eggs and other snacks. (In fact, she is rather unkindly linked with her pig, which Ermo secretly poisons.)

In contrast to the bedridden, emasculated former village head, the sexually active Xiazhi gets Ermo a job in town and eventually succeeds in seducing her. Thus, capital equals libido. Ermo begins to respond sexually to Xiazhi when she has had a "taste" of the world outside her village and the things money can buy if the consumer can afford them — an extravagantly bountiful meal at a restaurant; a 500 yuan pay-off for a new donkey for a hapless peasant who is side-swiped by Xiazhi's truck; and most important, the prized model in the town department store's captivating display of television sets.

The exposure to television and Ermo's increasing sense of self-identity as a consumer seems to have an effect on her sexuality, turning her "on." When her neighbor makes his first brusque physical advances toward her in the cabin of his truck, she resists, but then she begins to peel off her many layers of clothing and seems to reciprocate his desire. Later, she becomes a kind of parody of a kept woman as she moves to town to take the restaurant job to earn more money toward the television set. At first, Ermo appears to participate fully (if somewhat unwittingly) in her crude sexual awakening, which is inextricably linked with her life as a consumer. After the consummation of her relation with Xiazhi in the cabin of his battered truck, Ermo is roused in fear and wonderment to the spectacle of a sleek, shiny white Ford parked in front. (China awakens to Fordism!) Soon, Ermo becomes a kind of parody of a kept woman. When Xiazhi meets her in a seedy hotel for a sexual liaison, he presents her with a gift of wrinkle cream to keep her from getting as "slack-assed" as his wife. He slathers it generously all over her face and back as Ermo reveals a gaudy "city girl" brassiere she has bought. However, Xiazhi's discovery of the bruises on Ermo's arms from selling her blood forces a confrontation. Xiazhi wants to support Ermo and worries that she will ruin her health, but he is unable to summon the courage to leave his wife.

Realizing that Xiazhi has subsidized her restaurant wages, Ermo asserts that she is not a whore. However, she has definitely changed. Xiazhi's wife notices that her skin smells nice and is "whiter." The ironic implications of this observation in light of her development as a capitalist (not to mention adulterous woman) are obvious. Ermo has literally become whiter because of her consumption of consumer products.

Despite the Confucian code of ethics which presumably guides the lives of the peasants in Ermo's village, she does not seem burdened by guilt over her malicious poisoning of the neighbor's pig or her adulterous relationship. Nor is she especially loving or maternal in her interactions with her son and family. Rather than imply that Ermo has sold her soul for the smell of new money, the film suggests from the start that she is motivated by working for material gain, constantly lingering on her lack of affect (and the effect of lack) when it comes to family matters. The 29-inch TV vindicates her lack of "phallus." Ermo, like China, is ripe for capitalism. During one visit home, Ermo brings her husband and son matching, Western-style, crisp white cotton, button-down shirts. When she purchased them at the clothing market, the display featured cardboard heads of Caucasian models. As she opens the packages, her husband and son stand before her, both shirtless. Her husband's skinny torso, his sunken chest, make him seem even more helpless. As a silent and expressionless Ermo dresses her family, she demonstrates a knowledge and power gained from the purchase of and exposure to consumer goods. Her husband is

further, and rather pathetically, emasculated as she assists him in buttoning up his collar, and he pulls out a piece of cardboard, wondering if it's a joke.

There are also indications throughout the film that the traditional Chinese medicines Ermo administers to her husband are supposed to restore potency, but that the process is ultimately futile. When Ermo massages her husband's back with a large heated stick, and when the "Chief" sits wrapped in a floral blanket while his wife is outside working, his masculinity is continually undermined.

Ermo's nocturnal ritual of foot-kneading her noodle dough is therefore represented as a displaced expression of female sexuality. Zhou deliberately films these sequences as a kind of fragmented and elliptically masturbatory experience. Close ups of perspiring Ermo's face and her preternaturally expert feet highlight Ermo's intense engagement with the work activity and the unseen movements of the rest of her body, accentuated by jump cuts. Frustrated by her husband whom she must constantly nurse by cooking his medicines, massaging his back, etc., Ermo recognizes her position as "bread winner" in an earthly eroticized fashion. (After she starts bringing home substantial amounts of cash, she also enjoys counting her money in bed.) She regularly rises from her place in the bed between husband and son to experience some measure of liberation and pleasure through manual work. In Zhou's representations of the woman at work and the repeated images of the dough being squeezed and shaped into long, thin twisty noodles, Zhou foregrounds the notion of the doubled eroticization/ exoticization of the "primitive" — in terms of the peasant woman's sexuality and the traditional mode of noodle production.

Ermo's "premodern peasant" status is complicated by her incredible industriousness and creative corporeality, which is sometimes at odds with modernization. For example, when a mixing machine in the town restaurant (ironically called International Grand Restaurant) severs a male coworker's hand, Ermo improvises a more domesticated version of her footkneading in the restaurant's kitchen. When she discovers that she can make "blood money" (Ermo's logic is that women lose their blood anyway), she devises a subversive and ultimately self-destructive scheme whereby she can make repeated visits in the same day after drinking bowls of saltwater. Her entrepreneurship has vampiric consequences on her body, as Ermo becomes quite literally drained by her obsessive efforts to make more money. She increasingly runs down to the point of final collapse and loss of consciousness after she has finally achieved her goal of acquiring the television set, the fruit of her labor. Ermo's absence of pleasure provides the viewer with the most explicit critique of the effects of modernization and capitalism. Thus the film asks, as Tony Rayns has suggested,

"What...is the true nature of satisfaction in present-day China?"[9]

The film's narrative structure foregrounds the conflict between Chinese premodern rural life and the forces of modernization. And a natural extension of the conflated libidinal/ economic dynamic leads Ermo to begin taking rides to town with Xiazi — to avoid the "waste" of her labor. She initially wanted to find a wider market for the handwoven baskets she has made all winter. Ermo's repeated cry, "Mai mahua mian lou!" ("Twisty noodles for sale!") frames the film. This is the sound counterpart to the film's final image: static on a television screen. The "snow" represents the absence of televisual image and also the emptying out of meaning — a vacuity enhanced by Ermo's blank, waking gaze, absorbed into the television

frame.

SPECTATORSHIP AND FRAMES OF VISION

Throughout the film, Zhou represents the view from within and out the windows of Ermo and her husband's humble home as a kind of proto-television. The shape of the television screen, the fetish-object, largely frames the field of vision of the viewers. One shot early in the film captures both Ermo and her husband looking out from their window onto their neighbor's home as masses of villagers vie for a place in line to have a look at Blindman's television set. Images of Ermo and her husband are framed as if on a television screen, a commentary on the "materialization" of Ermo's desire. "Let's buy a TV for the boy," she tells her husband. Ermo looks out upon the masses of villagers who have gathered outside her neighbors' home hoping to watch their color television set. Meanwhile, her own son Tiger is one of the lucky spectators.

Television is signaled early on as a symbol both for Ermo's restlessness and for the effects of modernization. In several shots of the village at night, the town's silence is broken by the sounds of her neighbor's television set. Yet television also provides an ironic mode of community-building and perpetuating the extended family (socialism with Chinese characteristics?). Children crowd around, attracted by its lure. When Ermo's family finally purchases and brings home its own monumental color set, their home is filled with curious peasants. Ermo's ex-chief husband even suggests they fill their small house with children's benches to accommodate schoolchildren (although this gesture provides even more discomfort for the family). Acquiring the television set somehow seems to bond the family with feuding neighbors, as Ermo and her rival ride together into town with their husbands to purchase the television set, and Ermo's neighbor suggests that their children marry some day, officially fusing their families.

However, the film continually spoofs the inevitable impact of television on Chinese culture. At the end of the film, the television set in Ermo's home takes the literal place of the shared family bed. And as Ermo's noodle-strainer becomes a makeshift television antenna, it appears that she has lost her livelihood as well.

As the villagers and Ermo's family watch indiscriminately whatever appears on the set, the rather ludicrous pervasiveness and irrelevance/ decontextualization of U.S. popular culture is illustrated. For example, the first broadcast witnessed when the new set is turned on is of an U.S.-style football game. One of the peasant spectators perceives the televised scene as some sort of battle until a more worldly neighbor chides him, explaining that it's a sport: basketball. In fact, throughout the film, the images transmitted on television are never purely "Chinese." The medium is indeed a vehicle for capitalist ideology as well as a source of entertainment. Television influences the reshaping of the community, the family, and individual lives through the spread of western popular culture. And it also marks the elision or erosion of indigenous folk traditions.

ERMO repeats images of spectatorship throughout and connects them with consumer desire and ownership within the context of the town store and the family home. When Ermo first sets her sights on the "biggest" television set as her desired object and stakes her claim, she needs evidence that the TV set works. She is told by the sales clerk that she needs to pay first. Ermo worries that continual usage

(and, in turn, constant spectatorship) will drain the set of power. (Indeed, Ermo's first glimpse of a softcore love scene dubbed in Chinese is followed by a power failure which shuts the televisions off.)

As Ermo enters the store after finally accumulating sufficient capital to make her purchase, the camera assumes her point of view, zeroing in on the desired television set in the multi-set display. With her bundle of bills and flanked by her husband and Blindman, Ermo can finally lay claim to the power to turn the set on and off. Fittingly, after purchasing the set, Ermo insists that the consumer label be left on, fearing that the television may not work without it. Her logic reflects the way she has participated in the nexus of production and consumption.

At first shocked by the presence of what she can only identify as "foreign language" on television in China, Ermo increasingly marvels at the precision of the televisual illusion since she can see every strand of the foreigner's hair. The programs we see glimpses of range from aqua-exercise demonstrations to English-language lessons, but it hardly matters exactly what is on the screen. Television teaches Ermo how to be a good capitalist.

TELEVISUALITY AND GLOBAL POSTMODERN CULTURE

The popularization of television is one of the greatest fruits and most visible symbols of the social and economic reforms of the Deng era (1978-1996).

"In 1978, there were 1 million TV sets in China. [In 1996,] there were 232 million." [10]

The film uses Ermo's struggle to acquire the biggest TV set in her county as an allegory of the pursuit of wealth in the entire country. The steady diet of foreign soap operas in Chinese TV programming also indicates the opening of China to global culture. U.S. TV series aired in China since 1979 include *MAN FROM ATLANTIC*, *HUNTER*, *FALCON CREST*, *REMINGTON STEEL*, *MATT HOUSTON*, and *DYNASTY*. (It is reported that *DYNASTY* was Deng Xiaoping's favorite.) [11]

As Ermo's family lies sleeping at the end of the film, the television set continues to play on, broadcasting images of a titillating "romantic" scene from a U.S. nighttime soap opera — appropriately enough, a frothy shower scene. In fact, this is a love scene from *DYNASTY*, a genre of U.S. television series known for its "excessive style." [12] The episode ends as the female protagonist urges her adulterous male lover to "have more fun." However, the irony of U.S. television's discourse of pleasure is lost on Ermo and her dozing, oblivious family. At the end of the film, CCTV concludes a day's broadcast by reporting the weather of the major cities of the world: London, New York, Tokyo, Cairo, Bangkok, etc. The whole family has fallen asleep, unresponsive to the TV images. The relation between the global and the local is questioned. Contrary to the promise of instantaneous communication through electronic media in McLuhan's "global village," [13] what happens here is a breakdown of communication in the postmodern age.

The film embodies uneven and overlapping modes of production in Deng's China: the premodern (primitive manual labor), the modern (motorized vehicles, the truck, mechanized production of twisty noodles, electricity, "Fordism" as revealed

in a glimpse of the shiny white Ford), and the postmodern (electronic simulacra, antenna, television). That these various technological and social forces coexist and are highlighted in the film's narrative propels the protagonists' desires and brings out the contradictions of the Deng era. Ermo's family's final entrance into the world of global televisuality at the end reveals the ironies and paradoxes embedded in the process of globalization. On the one hand, televisual images of foreign lifestyles (especially in soap opera and soft-porn dubbed in Chinese) draw the attention of Chinese peasants and townspeople, seem to offer an alternative way out of the daily routine of their drab Chinese existence, and invite them to join "a brave new world" of fun and fulfillment. On the other hand, the CCTV's daily weather report from world capitals does not relate to local villagers' life in a meaningful way but rather induces sleep. At this point, at the local level of a post-Third World nation-state such as China, the global homogenization of cultural production and consumption meets serious, stubborn resistance.[14] The ultimate question to be raised, after all, is what happens if the ethnic subject in a (self-) ethnographic film does not return her gaze at global televisuality?

The 29-inch TV set is both the material and symbolic embodiment of Deng's slogan, "To get rich is glorious." Yet, the "snow," the blank screen at the end suggests a problematic, pervasive, existential, and ideological emptiness which has resulted from the kind of economism and pragmatism of the Deng era, a policy which is the opposite of the extreme "culturalism" of Mao Zedong that shaped such movements as the "Cultural Revolution." Tired, dispirited Ermo and her television's static annul the meaning and joy she found in her blind capitalistic pursuit of material objects. The film begins with Ermo's cry of noodle-selling and ends with the cry's musical refrain so the narrative comes round full cycle.

On the one hand, ERMO questions the goals, processes, and results of one-sided modernization and capitalism. And on the other hand, the film also indicates that an instantaneous introduction and airing of foreign television programs in China, in this postmodern age of communication, appears to fill a domestic void, a cultural and ideological lack. Thus, a remote post-Third-World Chinese village becomes a global village. Its televisual culture vividly stages the disjunctions and contradictions of global postmodern culture.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Gina Marchetti and *Jump Cut* editors for offering helpful comments for revision.

Although Zhou is one of the most well known directors of the so-called "Fifth Generation," existing studies of his films in English are few. For a study of one of his early films, see Tonglin Liu, "How Do You Tell a Girl from a Boy? Uncertain Sexual Boundaries in THE PRICE OF FRENZY," in *Significant Others: Gender and Culture in Film and Literature East and West*, ed. William Burgwinkle, Glenn Man, and Valerie Wayne (Honolulu: East West Center, University of Hawaii, 1993), pp. 63-74. Fredric Jameson briefly touched upon DESPERATION (1987/1988) in his essay "Remapping Taipei," in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, ed., Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, Esther Yau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 121. For an informative account of Zhou's career and a review of ERMO, see Tony Rayns, "The Ups and Downs of Zhou Xiao-wen," *Sight and Sound* 5:7 (July 1995): 22-24; "ERMO" (movie review),

Sight and Sound 5:7 (July 1995): 47-48.

Studies of Zhou's film art are more in Mainland Chinese film journals. See the special section devoted to him in *Dangdai dianying* (Contemporary Film) no.5 (1994): 28-55.

2. Terms such as postsocialism, postcoloniality, and postmodernity have been used to describe the uneven, hybrid quality of the social, economic, and cultural developments of the West as well as what was called the Third World. For questions of postsocialism in regard to Chinese cinema, see Paul G. Pickowicz, "Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism," in *New Chinese Cinemas*, pp. 57-87; for a discussion of postcoloniality and China's possible relation to it, see Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (1994): 328-356; for inquiries into the question of Chinese postmodernity, see Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "Postmodernity, Popular Culture, and the Intellectual: A Report on Post-Tiananmen China," *boundary 2* 23.2 (summer 1996): 139-169; "Art, Culture, and Cultural Criticism in Post-New China," *New Literary History* 28.1 (Winter 1997): 111-133; "Global POSTmodernIZATION: The Intellectual, the Artist, and China's Condition," *boundary 2* 24.3 (fall 1997): 65-97.

3. In fact, the omission of the countryside and the replacement with cityscape in an urban thriller such as *DESPERATION* by Zhou, or what amounts to the very erasure of "China," was underscored by Fredric Jameson in his comment on this film. It is a "peculiar process whereby the identifying marks of all specific, named cities have been systematically removed, in order to foreground the generally urban." "The high-tech espresso bars and bullet trains of *DESPERATION* thus dutifully block out a world of contemporary industrial production and consumption beyond all ideological struggle" ("Remapping Taipei," p.121.)

4. In another telling instance, Zhang Yimou's film *KEEP COOL* (Youhua haohao shoo), a film about life in contemporary Beijing, was poorly received in the 1997 Venice Film Festival and captured no awards. Obviously, international film festivals prefer and award Zhang's films about rural, primitive China such as *THE STORY OF QIU JU*

5. See Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

6. See Sheldon H. Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

7. As we write this essay, Zhou has turned away from filmmaking for the moment and is directing a TV series, *THE LEGEND OF EMPRESS LÜ* (Lühou chuanqi), a story based on early Chinese history (200 BC). Primetime TV drama is the most popular form of entertainment in contemporary China due the high rate of TV penetration in the average household. In cashing in on this lucrative entertainment business, Zhou's career move seems to bear certain similarities to the heroine's predicament in his own film *ERMO*.

8. James Lull, *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 1.

9. Tony Rayns, "Ermo" (movie review), p. 48.
10. Bill Powell, "A Fast Drive to Riches," in the special issue "China after Deng," *Newsweek* (March 3, 1997), p.32.
11. See Judith Marlene, "The World of Chinese Television," in *China at the Crossroads*, ed. Donald Altschiller (New York, The H. W. Wilson Company, 1994) p.217. For discussions of China's TV programming, see James Lull, *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); James Lull, "China's New Star: The Reformation on Prime-Time Television," in James Lull, *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television Audiences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 96-145; James Lull and Se-Wen Sun, "Agent of Modernization: Television and Urban Chinese Families," in *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), pp. 193-236.
12. For a discussion of this aspect of U.S. TV series, see Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form, and Television Today," in *The Media Reader*, ed. Manual Alvarado and John O. Thompson (London: BFI Press, 1990), pp. 253-264. For a recent study of televisuality, see John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
13. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
14. For essays on the interrelations of the global and the local in the post-Cold War era, see Rob Wilson and Wimal Disssanayake, ed., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).

ZHOU XIAOWEN FILMOGRAPHY

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- DESPERATION (a.k.a. THE LAST FRENZY: Zuihou de fengkuang). 1987.
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- THE BLACK MOUNTAIN ROAD (Heishan lu). 1989.
- NO REGRETS ABOUT YOUTH (Qingchun wuhui). 1991.
- THE IMPUSLE OF YOUTH (Qingchun chongdong). 1992.
- THE TRIAL (Xialu yinghao). 1992.
- THE LIE DETECTOR (Cehuang qi). 1993.
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- THE EMPEROR'S SHADOW (Qin song). 1995.

East Palace, West Palace Staging gay life in China

by Chris Berry

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EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE (DONGGONG, XIGONG 1996) is the first feature film from mainland China to deal with gay life there today.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] The title is taken from Beijing gay slang, and it refers to the two public toilets either side of the Forbidden Palace on the north edge of Tiananmen Square. Much of the film takes place during the night at a similar location in an inner city park, a typical gay cruising zone in Beijing, and in the park police station. But the film is not slice-of-life realist. Developed originally as a stage play by director Zhang Yuan, it is highly dramatized, reminiscent to a western viewer of Genet perhaps.

The main focus is an exchange between one of the men in the park, A Lan (played by Si Han), and Shi Xiaohua (played by Hu Jun), one of the cops whose job it is to harass them. A Lan forms a masochistic infatuation with the cop and goes all out to get taken in for questioning. Alone with the policeman in the station, A Lan then spends the night revealing his fantasies and his past to the cop, simultaneously trying to provoke him and to seduce him. This is Zhang Yuan's fifth feature, and his most critically acclaimed so far. Given the uneven quality of Zhang Yimou's recent work and Chen Kaige's lapse into the production of *chinoiserie* that out-Bertoluccis Bertolucci, EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE stakes a serious claim for Zhang Yuan to be the mainland director who has produced the most consistently interesting body of work so far in the 1990s.

Zhang Yuan has many gay friends and is also working on a documentary about China's first transsexual, the modern dancer Jin Xing, who went overnight from being referred to as "he" in the Chinese press to "she" without any explanation at all offered to readers. It is provisionally titled MISS JIN XING (JIN XING XIOJIE). However, Zhang himself is not gay, and indeed he wrote the script of EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE together with his wife Ning Dai. So, when I interviewed him in 1996 soon after completion of the film, one of my first questions was about his interest in the topic. He noted,

"Many of my films are concerned with minorities living on the margins of society. MAMA (1990) looked at the disabled, BEIJING BASTARDS (BEIJING ZAZHONG, 1992) examined the rock music subculture, and

SONS (ERZI, 1995) focused on alcoholism and unemployment."

In the discussion that followed, Zhang made it clear that as a filmmaker whose work is invisible but not actually illegal in China, he has a certain amount in common with gay men and other marginalized groups. The opening scenes of EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE indicate that although there is no law specifically forbidding homosexuality in China, this does not mean gays are free from police harassment.[2] As the character we later discover is A Lan comes out of the stalls in the park men's room, a policeman washing his hands asks A Lan a series of questions, starting with where he lives and ending with a request to see his ID and even his bike permit. In the next scene, the police round up the men in the park at night, punishing them by forcing them to squat down, beating them, telling them to slap themselves, and threatening to inform their employers.

In Zhang's case, the authorities dislike what he is doing so much that in 1994 they issued a notice forbidding anyone to cooperate any further with him and a number of other filmmakers. When I asked why they had not stopped him completely, he joked,

"That's quite natural. I love my country and I love the Party, just like A Lan in my film loves that policeman."

What kind of love does A Lan have for Shi Xiaohua? A Lan compares himself to a female thief in a Beijing opera. As the policeman naps, A Lan stands over him, saying,

"The convict loves her executioner. The thief loves her jailkeeper. We love you, we have no other choice."[3]

Toward the end of the film, A Lan repeats the same lines to the now conscious Shi Xiaohua, adding,

"I love you. Why don't you love me?"

Indeed, although Zhang Yuan has worked outside the system throughout the 1990s without being stopped, EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE has already provoked the most concrete government action against him yet. No doubt this is at least in part because, of all his five features, this one has received the greatest international attention. The film was invited to take part in Un Certain Regard at the 1997 Cannes International Film Festival. Zhang should have been there in person for this career highlight, but the Chinese authorities seized his passport to prevent him from leaving the country. When the Cannes organizers refused to pull Zhang Yuan's film, they also pressured the producers of Zhang Yimou's new film, KEEP COOL (YOU HUA HAO HAO SHUO) to withdraw from the festival.

Had he been able to attend the opening ceremony, I suspect Zhang Yuan would have enjoyed the little performance Cannes put on to address the Chinese government's actions. By placing an empty chair on the stage to symbolize his absence, they simultaneously made both him and his absence present to the audience.[4] Zhang is equally adept at dealing with the Chinese authorities. And he has also developed a strong interest in this sort of playing with performance and reality in a tension between high drama and high realism that runs through his

work.

When I spoke to Zhang a couple of years ago after seeing his observational documentary about Tiananmen Square, *THE SQUARE* (GUANGCHANG, co-directed with Duan Jinchuan, 1994), he suggested that, to him, the square itself was like a large stage on which all sorts of people performed.[5] I reminded him of this after *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE*. He elaborated, saying,

"If you want to say I strive for the authentic in my films, that authenticity has two aspects to it. One side is realism, and the other side is subjective truth. In *THE SQUARE* and *BEIJING BASTARDS* I leaned more towards realism, but I think that in *MAMA* and *SONS* I leaned more towards my own subjective truth. Actually, all of my films have a tension between the subjective and the objective, and in *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE*, my subjectivity has been particularly strong."

In this article, I would like to look at *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* and China's emergent gay and lesbian culture by examining the connection between Zhang's interest in social marginality (including his own as an independent filmmaker) and his interest in highlighting and blurring the line between drama and reality. For, paradoxically, although the space of performance on stage or within a feature film is marked off from what we know as "the real world" in a mutually constitutive manner, acting is not so much outside the world as a special sort of doing in the world.

This insight has been central to and indeed constitutive of the focus in cultural studies and queer studies on theories of performance and performativity in recent years. In the introduction to a collection of articles on the topic, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick summarizes Jacques Derrida's deconstruction in "Signature Event Context" of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*:

"Where Austin, then, seemed intent on separating the actor's citational practices from ordinary speech-act performances, Derrida regarded both as structured by a generalized iterability, a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike." [6]

Breaking down the distinction between the space of the stage and the space of the real world on the basis of generalized citationality has various effects. First, as discussed most notably in the work of Judith Butler as well as Sedgwick, it suggests that being is based on the kind of doing that acting is. Furthermore, if identities in the real world are also performed and not given, then they can be cited and read "wrongly" but productively in order to construct different identities and undermine seemingly natural givens.[7] As a result, many recent, English-language, studies have focused on the way in which existing social identities are performed or constructed and on particular instances of their perversion, so to speak, in these productive misreadings and miscitations.

In what follows, first I want to identify some of the features of Zhang Yuan's work that also draw attention to the way that being is connecting to the special kind of doing that acting is. However, I then want to go on to draw attention to the some important differences between the kind of emphasis on performance found in Zhang's work and the emphasis on perversion (in the sense cited above) in the

work of Butler and others.

I will argue that in Zhang's work, the emphasis is more on access to public discourse, the ability to find a place to stage a public performance at all. I will argue that this problematic is not only one that Zhang shares with gay men and the other Chinese social minorities he represents in his work. Instead, it is generalized across Chinese society today, and it is the product of the contradictions that characterize and constitute the contemporary Chinese post-socialist condition. On one hand, relaxing central control in the economic realm has produced a plural society composed of a wide range of different social groupings. But on the other hand, increasing central control in the ideological realm struggles to maintain strict limits on the ability of those social groupings to establish their identities and win public recognition for them. Perhaps the case of gays and lesbians in China is the most extreme example of this contradiction that Zhang Yuan has dealt with so far. But it is also a contradiction that extends to cover him and his fellow independent filmmakers who have worked outside the state sector to date.

Zhang's first film, *MAMA*, a drama about a separated woman's struggle to look after her mentally disabled son, places a strong emphasis on the use of real locations as opposed to studio sets and includes some documentary elements. As the film demonstrates, not only do the needs of the disabled receive little attention from the under-resourced state in China, but most ordinary citizens even prefer to ignore them altogether. However, in most other ways, *MAMA* is a comparatively conventional drama made within the studio system for Xi'an Film Studio.

It is with his next and first independent film that his interest in the permeability of the screen world and real life starts to make itself apparent. In *BEIJING BASTARDS*, Zhang focuses on Beijing rock'n'roll youth subculture. No doubt he was partly inspired by the music videos (known as "MTV"s in China) that he had been shooting to make a living. But more importantly, the locations were real and many of the actors were non-professionals, drawn from the subculture the film represents. In this way, Zhang was opening up the space of the screen for another social group that had received little recognition or understanding in China to date.

In *THE SQUARE*, Zhang moves from features to documentaries and from including real life people as performers of roles similar to themselves to showing the performance that is inherent in real life. He made this film directly after the government "document" (*wenjian*) forbidding him to make more films and other people to cooperate with him.[8] Clearly, the decision to go and shoot in Tiananmen Square, the political heart of China, was politically pointed as well as a demonstration of his sheer ability to go on.[9] However, as already noted, Zhang and co-director Duan Jinchuan not only document daily life in the square but show the square as a kind of stage that people come to from Beijing and around the country to perform on.

THE SQUARE is an observational film in the manner of Fred Wiseman, without voice-over commentary or extra-diegetic music, and so it is open to many interpretations. However, what I see in *THE SQUARE* is a tension between ordinary people, who come there to exercise, fly kites, throw Frisbees and walk around, and the police, politicians and other official groups who use it to stage their events. When visiting dignitaries arrive, ordinary citizens are cordoned off. When the military police go for their jog, the old men exercising have to stand

aside. Once the police have moved through, one of the old men comments, "They're gone now, let's get on." Furthermore, given Tiananmen's history as a site for larger public contestations of this sort, not only in 1989 but also on many other occasions during China's recent history, it is difficult not to think of this larger significance as one watches the film. Here, then, power and social identity are represented as a sort of performance in which the contest for access to public space is key.

Finally, in *SONS*, Zhang Yuan took the whole intermixing of documentary and feature film making to a new level. He made this film when one of the amateur actors from *BEIJING BASTARDS*, who lived in the same building as Zhang Yuan did at the time, approached him and suggested he make a film about his family's life. The parents in the family were members of a dance troupe. The father is an alcoholic, both sons are unemployed and heavily into alcohol themselves. Zhang and Ning Dai interviewed the family at length, then had them reenact key scenes from their family history. In this way, a stage family in real life stages its own history on film, again placing into public discourse a variety of social problems and issues that are normally ignored.

Set against this developing problematic of stage and real life in his work, *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* may seem like a step away at first. Although the actor who plays A Lan is not a professional, he was not recruited from the Beijing gay scene but from Zhang's film crew. The rest of the actors in the film are not from the gay scene, either. And although studio sets are not used, the locations are not real life Beijing cruising zones, possibly to avoid provoking crackdowns on those places. Furthermore, the film is highly dramatized. There are fantasies, flashbacks, and a tense dialogue between A Lan and the policeman that is certainly too highly crafted to seem real in any everyday slice-of-life sense.

The camerawork is highly crafted, too, drawing attention to itself as it communicates through circling movements the power-play and surveillance that is the film's general ambiance. For example, when A Lan's story of his humiliation and beating by one of his partners is enacted on the screen, the camera circles 360 degrees around him again and again while his partner and his friend attack A Lan. Similarly, when the policeman arrests A Lan and makes him squat in the little park police station, the cop goes out and circles the building, looking in at A Lan through the windows. But towards the end of the film, when A Lan is turning the tables on the cop and the cop tells him to leave, it is A Lan who circles the building looking in through the windows.

However, I would argue that in the light of Zhang's previous productions, what this highly dramatized quality draws attention to is the immense difficulty at the moment of putting China's real gay subculture into public discourse. Unlike the case with the disabled, the unemployed, alcoholics or rock'n'roll kids, here the risk of reprisals is simply too great. At one point in my interview with him, I pointed out to Zhang Yuan that in his focus on nighttime cruising, toilet sex, masochism, cross-gender identification, and run-ins with the police, *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* was a long way from the cozy coupledness of a film like Ang Lee's *WEDDING BANQUET* and might be seen as presenting a negative image of homosexuality. Zhang responded,

"I believe this dramatic situation and these characters are a true expression of the current circumstances gays in China live under. I

interviewed many, many people, including my own friends and also sociologists who have carried out investigations of gay life in China and AIDS researchers. All the stories I heard, including those from the gay community itself, were bound by circumstances of oppression, discrimination and control. In China today, there is no visible gay culture, and no one understands gay people. It is very hard to find any gay friends who are living a happy, well-adjusted life under these circumstances, and in fact I cannot think of anyone I know like that."

I would suggest that this circumstance and Zhang's way of dealing with it in *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* highlight the fact that his films are not so much about the way in which identities can be performed differently, which is a major emphasis in the work of Judith Butler and others on performativity, but rather on the whole question of how they can be performed at all. The generalized citationality that Butler and other contemporary theorists of performance and performativity emphasize requires that we also re-think the distinction between the space of the stage and the space of "real life." The citation and iterability traditionally been used to distinguish the stage from "real life" may in fact be everywhere. In this case, however, the stage and stage-like spaces are still differentiated from the other spaces on the basis of their public visibility.

I will not construct a binary distinction between the public and the private here, for I am aware of many degrees of public visibility and privacy. Nor do I wish to enter into debates about the public sphere. Rather, by the idea of public I simply want to suggest that some spaces of performance have a greater social visibility and hence a greater power to disseminate more widely than others. Access to public performance may be limited or facilitated by social power structures. In other words, we need to ground Butler's insights into performativity's potential both socially and historically if we are to understand how it does not simply smuggle the liberal free subject back into the picture but instead inscribes agency as regulated and deployed differentially.

In *EAST PALACE*, *WEST PALACE* this focus on performativity in relation to access to public space and public discourse is dramatized in the all night exchange between A Lan and the policeman that takes up most of the film. In fact, A Lan's capacity to re-stage conventional scenarios and behaviors so as to seize agency has been illustrated earlier in the film.

When the police seize the men in the park at the beginning of the film, he is amongst them and is taken back by Shi Xiaohua for questioning. But on the way, instead of behaving as a captured criminal, he seizes the circumstances of walking together to the police station as an opportunity to treat Shi Xiaohua as one of his nighttime partners. When A Lan kisses the cop impulsively, Shi is so shocked he lets A Lan go. A Lan runs off. Furthermore, when Shi takes him in for questioning the second time, clearly he knows A Lan is the man who has sent him the book inscribed, "To my love. A Lan," because he asks, "You're A Lan, aren't you?" So, from the very beginning Shi's motives in taking A Lan in for questioning are blurred, and A Lan knows this as well as the audience does.

However, Shi sets up the circumstances as a conventional police interrogation in which a confession is expected. He makes A Lan squat down and tells the prisoner to speak as he prepares to write it all down. However, the police confession is a

public record. A Lan seizes this opportunity as eagerly as the earlier walk back through the park. He uses these rare circumstances in which Chinese gay men achieve a certain public visibility to perform his role differently, perversely. He insists on using the confession not as a space to denigrate or incriminate himself but as a mechanism to tell his story and state his case, insisting that his masochistic gay engagements are love and that the policeman stop calling them disgusting.

At first, he answers Shi's questions straightforwardly. But very quickly, he uses them to move away from the confessional mode. A Lan is married, and when Shi asks to whom, A Lan uses this as an opportunity to speak about his first sexual experience with a man. Although he imagines himself as "the girl" in the encounter and it is by no means a simply positive and affirmative one, A Lan ends the story with an emotional assertion that the next morning "I knew I was alive!" Not surprisingly, the policeman gets angry, telling him to cool down. Later, when the policeman attempts to characterize him as trash, A Lan answers back, provoking the policeman to say,

"Have you forgotten where you are? You're getting out of line."

Indeed he is. By now, confession is moving towards seduction. A Lan tells Shi that his mother used to tell him to be good or the policeman would come to get him but, "I loved to hear that sentence." As an adult, he continues, looking up at Shi,

"I saw a policeman walking through the park and suddenly my dream came true. He arrested me."

It would be inappropriate for me to give away the outcome of this contest between seduction and confession. However, what I want to emphasize here is not only the way in which A Lan's performative perversity attempts to reconstruct and resignify his own identity differently, but also how that attempt depends on the ability to seek out and obtain access to public space, public discourse and public record, however unpromising the particular circumstances might seem.

Of course, this question of access to and regulation of public discourse is relevant in any society, and I think it is important for any discussion of performativity that wishes to avoid idealism. But it seems particularly charged in the People's Republic of China, where the actions of the government in relation to this year's Cannes film festival are only the latest in a long series that asserts control over Chinese film and other media not only within its own borders but internationally. In these circumstances where access is difficult, it is not only a question of in what ways identities are cited and miscited, but whether they are allowed to be or able to find ways to make themselves visible at all. As Zhang Yuan points out in relation to his motivation for making EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE,

"Although there are many stories recorded about gays in Chinese culture, after the Liberation of 1949 and especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the very word 'homosexual' disappeared from all newspapers, books, and even public discussion."

The problem of visibility is something that affects not only gays in China but also many other social groups. Indeed it is this broad issue that seems to lie behind

Zhang Yuan's concern with contemporary Chinese life, particularly the lives of younger city people like himself, and it is something he shares with many other filmmakers of his generation. Zhang graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1989. Because the academy is China's only film school and does not take in students every year, Zhang's class was the first to graduate after the so-called Fifth Generation, which included such now internationally-famous names as Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang. Therefore, some people refer to the new generation of young filmmakers as the "sixth generation," but this is an appellation that Zhang and his peers dislike. While they admire their predecessors, they would prefer to be treated separately and individually.

Nonetheless, it is the case that the graduates of 1989 do seem to have used a turn to contemporary life as a way of marking themselves out from the Fifth Generation. The vast majority of the famous Fifth Generation films, from *YELLOW EARTH* to *RED SORGHUM*, *JU DOU*, *RAISE THE RED LANTERN*, *HORSE THIEF*, *FAREWELL TO MY CONCUBINE*, *SHANGHAI TRIAD*, and *RED FIRECRACKER*, *GREEN FIRECRACKER*, have been set in an almost mythical version of the pre-revolutionary past. Although those films have frequently been interpreted as metaphorical commentaries on the present, Zhang Yuan and his peers clearly have had no patience with indirect games, possibly seeing in the resort to these techniques a compromise and effective submission that they wished to eschew in favor of a more direct visibility. Hence, not only all of Zhang Yuan's films, but also Wang Xiaoshuai's *THE DAYS* and *VIETNAM GIRL*, Wu Ming's *FROZEN*, He Jianjun's *RED BEADS* and *THE POSTMAN*, and Lu Xuechang's *THIS IS HOW STEEL IS MADE*, not to mention the works of China's independent documentary video makers, are nearly all set in contemporary urban Chinese milieus readily recognizable to the viewer.

In many cases, these films are also concerned with making visible that which is usually hidden from view or denied a space in public discourse in the People's Republic. *THE DAYS*, *FROZEN*, and *RED BEADS* all focus on alienated young artists and members of the middle classes. Like all of Zhang Yuan's films except *MAMA*, these three films were made independently without the benefit of state-run studio involvement, which means there is no mechanism to submit them for classification and release in China. *VIETNAM GIRL* looks at migration from the countryside to the city, often illicit, and prostitution; *THIS IS HOW STEEL IS MADE* looks at alienated youth, including consideration of drugs, alcohol, sex, and rock'n'roll. Both these films were produced in 1996 by Tian Zhuangzhuang (best known as the director of *HORSE THIEF* and *BLUE KITE*) for his company attached to Beijing Film Studio. However, apparently the latter film has had to be radically changed before being passed for release, and *VIETNAM GIRL* has only been permitted a limited release within China and no export.

THE POSTMAN is also an independent film produced outside the state system, and it is particularly interesting in this context for its shared interest in surveillance, silencing and social marginality. The film follows a young postman who takes over a delivery route when his predecessor is sentenced to labor reform by his employers for opening mail.[10] Soon, the new postman is doing the same thing, and in the process he discovers what goes on behind closed doors in Beijing today, including drug use, prostitution, homosexuality, and various other subplots. He himself has sex in the backroom of the post office one night with a fellow

employee, but neither of them ever speaks about it again. Furthermore, he not only opens letters but also begins to interfere in the lives of the people on this route, often with cruel and disastrous results. Just as A Lan's masochistic desires seem to be a perverse and not necessarily affirmative form of resistance, so the unusual performance of his duties by the postman seem to be at once formed by his environment, an act of resistance, and also highly ambivalent and disturbing.

As well as in the filmmaking world, regular Chinese citizens elsewhere are showing a greater interest in speaking openly and without scripting about aspects of their lives that they might well not have wished to air publicly before. This is particularly evident on Chinese television. A decade ago, it was almost impossible to see man-on-the-street interviews. Most documentary and news interviews with ordinary people were carefully controlled. Most citizens, if approached to speak publicly, might well have shied away for fear of saying the wrong thing. This has changed, and many people attribute this to the introduction of a daily ten-minute show on China Central Television in 1992 called DONGFANG SHIKONG (unfortunately usually translated as ORIENTAL MOMENT). Here, ordinary citizens spoke about their lives and feelings in a relatively spontaneous manner. The show was a hit, and a more spontaneous approach prevails across the whole television world today.

Similarly, when a Chinese journalist decided to use a home video camera to make an independent documentary about gay life in 1996, he was able to find six individuals and couples who were willing to go on camera for in-depth interviews about their lives, including one elderly man willing to describe how things were at the height of Maoism. Presumably a video intended for very limited and controlled circulation would be less threatening in this regard than a feature film like EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE. The video, called COMRADES in English, was shown at the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival that year.^[11] As well as interviews, the video includes footage shot around some of the main sites in Beijing. One particularly moving scene is shot in a public park that is a popular cruising area. Apart from not filming the faces of the people who agree to speak to him in the park, the director's handheld camera work is shaky. The filmmaker told me this was because he was so nervous about what he was doing that he was he could not stop trembling. And of course, this is not a video that is publicly or commercially available in China today.

How are we to understand the contradiction between the government's efforts to control access to public discourse tightly and the evident increased willingness and eagerness of citizens to engage in public discourse? This double phenomenon needs to be understood as simultaneously the product of and constitutive of China's post-socialist condition. Since 1979, the government has decentralized and rolled back control to allow the development of a market economy alongside the state economy and to encourage enterprise and independent initiative. This basic shift certainly underlies the cultural move away from a psychology of waiting for instructions from above, and it has provided the material conditions to produce a socially plural society composed of many different groups. At the same time, the government appears concerned to assert control over this burgeoning culture and still driven by a command economy mentality. Restricting access to the relatively privileged platform of public discourse is clearly one way of keeping control.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this is an ongoing contest and a

difficult one for all concerned. In the film world, the days of independent filmmaking may be over. In July 1996, using the rhetoric of encouraging the rule of law, the government introduced a new Film Law. This law specifically makes it illegal to produce any film outside the studio system, which means that Zhang Yuan is now forced to find a studio to work with for his next production. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, he has found a topic which is also concerned with supposedly generous legal amendments. The film he has been researching over the last few months focuses on prisoners on death row. A recent Chinese law allows model prisoners to return to their families for Chinese New Year. Zhang intends to structure the film around such a home visit, although it is not clear that he will perform this reunion in the warm and loving manner presumably envisaged by the drafters of the law.

The new restrictions instituted in the Film Law can be seen as a direct response to the increased visibility and access to public space and discourse, which the independent filmmakers gained in the 1990s. As they gained greater recognition, so they inspired stronger government response. This highlights the perils of the very visibility that they have sought out. This danger no doubt also applies to other socially marginalized groups. EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE shows that the absence of direct legal proscription is clearly not a sign of social tolerance or support. But the greater visibility that Chinese gays and lesbians are gaining at the moment may well lead to new struggles in the future. It is no accident that both of China's most prominent gay activists, Gary Wu and Wan Yanhai, decided to relocate at least temporarily to the United States in 1996. However, they too are as determined to find a way to continue their work as is Zhang Yuan.

NOTES

1. I want to acknowledge my discussions with Wan Yanhai in Beijing, Gary Wu by e-mail, Seo Dongjin of the Seoul Queer Film and Video Festival, and Professor Kim So Young of the Korean National University of the Arts, as well as my students at the KNUA and La Trobe University in Melbourne, for helping to form my thoughts in this article, I am also very grateful to Wouter Barendrecht of Fortissimo Film Sales for providing me with a videotape of EAST PALACE, WEST PALACE, and Zhang Yuan for speaking to me so frankly and answering so many questions.

2. For further details on gay life in China, see Paul Richardson, "Subcultural Revolution, *Attitude* 1:10 (February, 1995), pp. 68-74. Wan Yanhai, "Becoming a Gay Activist in Contemporary China," in Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (eds.), *Emerging Lesbian and Gay Identities and Communities in Asia* (1998).

3. All dialogues are transcriptions of subtitles rather than retranslations that might give a fuller version of the original Chinese but make it more difficult for non-Chinese speakers to identify the scenes discussed.

& <<http://www.tmiweb.com/Bigfree/Tpacfree/1069/Cannes/cannes2.html>>

5. Chris Berry, "Zhang Yuan: Thriving in the Face of Adversity," *Cinemaya* 32 (Spring 1996), pp. 40-43.

6. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction: Performativity and Performance," in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Performativity and Performance*

(New York: Routledge. 1995), p.4.

7. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Butler's more recent books develop the insights established here further.

8. As readers who have seen Zhang Yimou's *THE STORY OF QIU JU* (1992) will be aware, law and regulation are complex matters in China. A "document" is a government announcement or directive. It is not the same as a law, and indeed its legal status is a little ambiguous. Zhang Yuan maintains that although he heard about this "document" and its publication in the newspapers, it was never actually delivered to him, and so he did not feel himself bound by it.

9. For further discussion of the production circumstances of this film, see the interview with co-director Duan Jinchuan included in Chris Berry, "We Live in a Country of Earthquakes': China's Independent Documentary Film Makers," *Metro* (Melbourne, 1997).

10. In China, punishments like this can be administered directly by employers without recourse to the court system.

11. I have refrained from naming the filmmaker because, although he has been named in one or two other places, I am not sure that he wishes to be publicly identified.

Song of the Exile The politics of "home"

by Chua Siew Keng

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"Home for the exile in a secular and contingent world is always provisional." — Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994)

First, let me locate the moment of my first viewing of Ann Hui's 1990 film. SONG OF THE EXILE. It was 1991 and I was visiting in Singapore — in my mother's house — as an "exile" living overseas who had temporarily returned to the homeland, to the mother('s) land. So the questions which the film raises of home and exile have a special poignancy for me, a certain resonance in my reading of the film. Today as I review SONG OF THE EXILE to write this paper, I have returned to living and working in Singapore. This paper attempts to locate "home" and "exile" within the film's discourse while also locating the film itself within the discourse of "home" and "exile."

To be an exile entails dislocation from a certain space and relocation in an/other space. That first space, then, can be (de)constructed as Home and the second as the Other space. The exile lives in an/other space whose alterity poignantly stands out, as she compares the other space to the first, originary space. That is, the exiled journeys either physically or mentally every so often to that first space while living in the alternate, other space. In addition, being an exile is about crossing borders or about living and being located in the interstices between cultural and other boundaries. Exile draws on a marginal space not uncommon to women's experience.

SONG OF THE EXILE makes an explicit parallel between the space of women's experience and the space of cultural marginality. The film speaks of the pain women encounter as "exiles" in spaces relegated to them in domestic homes, especially when the conjugal home of a patrilocal marriage becomes a space of exile for the daughter-in-law. In Chinese marriage in particular, the married woman often does not adopt the name of the family she marries into, a custom still practiced today in both overseas Chinese societies and in mainland China. Traditionally, this practice indicates that the new family considers her an outsider, though the practice today is also retained by women who consciously wish to signal an identity independent from that of their husband.

The exiled subject, then, not only feels a sense of exclusion and marginality in this space-other-than-home, but she also perceives and constructs the otherness of this space where s/he is presently located. She is an Other in a physical space which she also mentally constructs as an Other. In other words, the exile constructs the exiled space as other than home, a space where she feels excluded and estranged, and these feelings are enhanced by this act of her construction.

At the same time, the journey back to the first space, the originary place, cannot fully recover "home." "Home" is indelibly altered by the exile's or the wife's living in an alternate/alternative space. Such are the kinds of concerns that SONG OF THE EXILE deals with in the light of the diasporic scattering in the imminence of Hong Kong's "return" to the "homeland" in July 1997.

This film interweaves national concerns, issues of crossing cultural borders, and the marginality which marks women's spaces. In the film, events are seen through the consciousness of the central character Hueying, the daughter of a Cantonese father and a Japanese mother, as Hueying returns to Hong Kong after years of living in England. Indeed, the film begins in the space of the British colonial motherland before locating subsequent events in Hong Kong, Guangdong, Macau, Japan, and back to Hong Kong.

In a flashback, the teenage Hueying leaves the parental home in Hong Kong to live in a boarding school. The father remains in China's shadow and the mother in Japan's. The film, through its plot and characterization, explores the relation of these two hegemonic cultural centers to Hong Kong, especially as the narrative interrogates the consciousness of the child, Hueying, as a product of her parents' crossing the two cultures' borders. Most acutely, the Japanese mother, Aiko, has the identity of a colonized subject in Macau, where she moved as a young bride and raised the infant Hueying.

In its flashbacks, the film particularly presents events from the position of the mother, Aiko, in those years. In this way, SONG OF THE EXILE resonates with the sentiments of the 3rd Century BC Chinese poet, Tsai Yen's poem, "18 Verses Sung to a Tartar Reed Whistle,"[1][[open notes in new window](#)] since Tsai Yen's situation in many ways mirrors Aiko's situation; the Chinese poet bore two sons to a Tartar chieftain — Aiko, two daughters to a Chinese man. In her poem, Tsai Yen laments being a double exile. Throughout history, Chinese women who assume the fate of a daughter-in-law have had the experience of being an exile in their conjugal home — a space in which they are "foreigners" in a web of patrilocal and patriarchal relations. In the case of both Aiko and Tsai Yen, being foreign wives makes them doubly exiled.

SONG OF THE EXILE foregrounds the narrator's Japanese mother's sense of such exile within a traditional Chinese marriage. When she is living with her husband's family soon after World War 2, Aiko understands her situation as doubly "foreign" — as both a daughter-in-law in a traditional Chinese family in her conjugal home and as a Japanese. Although Aiko has long spoken of her suffering to her child-daughter, it is a pain which Hueying as a little child notes but cannot understand till years later. The film's narrative traces the daughter Hueying's odyssey in understanding both this sense of her mother's exile and that of her own, different kind of exile on her return to her home/land after graduating from film school in England.

Everywhere she shuttles to, Aiko finds herself marginalized, just as she was exiled from home (Japan) in the culturally Chinese Macau and Hong Kong. Yet she also feels alienated when she returns "home" to Japan in the 1970s. Thus, in returning "home" again she becomes doubly exiled since her trip to visit her family does not turn out as she had envisaged. At first she is pleased to be in her native Japan with friends and family, but later she finds that the (Japanese) food is too cold, her younger brother still considers her a traitor and an enemy, and her former lover has grown old and unsavory. (Throughout the film there are cultural markers of difference between Chinese and Japanese cultures — such as food, clothing, toiletries, domestic/ feminine markers)

"But every place she went
they pushed her to the other side
and that other side pushed her to the other side
of the other side
of the other side
Kept in the shadows of other."
— Gloria Anzaldua (quoted in Trinh, 14)

"Walking on masterless and ownerless land is living always anew with the exile's condition; which is here not quite an imposition nor a choice, but a necessity. You'll learn that in this house it's hard to be a stranger. You'll also learn that it's not easy to stop being one. If you miss your country, every day you'll find more reasons to miss it. But if you manage to forget it and begin to love your new place, you'll be sent home, and then, uprooted once more, you'll begin a new exile."
— Maurice Blanchot (quoted in Trinh, 26)

At the same time that Aiko and Hueying visit Japan, Hueying's Chinese grandparents must deal with their own suffering within their homeland, the China to which they have returned for idealistic reasons. Despite his efforts to help in the revolution, the grandfather himself has been tortured by the Red Guards. Hueying goes to visit him after her trip to Japan and finds the grandfather lying sick and dying. Yet he still advises his granddaughter that he has hope for China since the younger generation, including Hueying, can and should help to build that country's future.

As *SONG OF THE EXILE* narrates the domestic tyrannies, conflicts, loves and shared sufferings of a cross-cultural Chinese family, we see that all the family members bear some sense of exile. The film privileges the mother-daughter relation. Both women live as cultural exiles possessing cross-cultural/ cross-ethnic identities. The film's narrative is constructed in such a way that their identities are never fixed but always in a state of flux. We see their process of constructing personal identity as continual. The questions, then, "Whose home?" and "Whose country?" take on the mantle of "Where is home?" and "Which space is the 'exiled' space?" As Stuart Hall summarizes this process of exile consciousness,

"The notion of an identity that knows where it came from, where home is, but also lives in the symbolic...knows you really can't go home again" (Hall, 11).

HONG KONG AS A HOME IN EXILE

An immensely compassionate film, *SONG OF THE EXILE* looks at how an exiled person's cultural identity becomes constructed differently from that acquired in the homeland of birth or extraction. The film takes an ethnographic look at how identification also entails or is shaped by a process of acculturation. Within the film, the narrator, Hueying, takes the role of both subject and ethnographer.

Hueying returns to Hong Kong after graduating with a MA in television and film studies in England to attend the wedding of her younger sister, Huewei. The film, set in the early 70s, deals primarily with Hueying's relationship with her Japanese mother, Aiko, with whom she had been estranged since she was a little girl. Hueying's father had met Aiko in Manchuria when he was a Chinese soldier in the Second World War. Aiko, on account of an unrequited love, had followed her brother to Manchuria just before the war when Japan had invaded China. When Hue's father asked Aiko to marry him, she forsook her homeland to live first with her parents-in-law in Macau and then followed her husband to Hong Kong, leaving Hueying behind with the child's beloved grandparents since the little girl had refused to go with her. The child-daughter becomes the site of contestation of generational conflict and also the site of contestation of cultures — paternal Chinese versus maternal Japanese culture.

The film explores the politics of difference among the film's three major female characters — representing three generations — who all have contesting feminine boundaries and bonds. The film depicts Hue's grandmother as a traditional chauvinist Chinese mother-in-law who polices patriarchal loyalties in the conjugal home. While living in the in-laws' Chinese household, Hueying's mother, the Japanese outsider, suffers in silence while playing the role of the traditional daughter-in-law until her resentment brews against her own daughter, Hueying. In her own consciousness, Aiko clearly identifies the causes of her victimization, but she cannot articulate them as such until she leaves the conjugal home. In contrast, Hueying, the granddaughter and daughter respectively, is blinded by the paternal grandparents' very real, indulgent love toward her. For this reason, Hueying estranges herself from her mother until awakened by her own experience of alienation in a foreign culture.

Hueying's problem is to negotiate (her way) home. She must face the problem of whether "home" is the China of her grandfather or Hong Kong, the acculturated land of her mother. Certainly her trip to Japan, to her mother's former girlhood home, has taught her that her mother's old home could never be her new one. At the film's end, her own re-acculturation in Hong Kong after her English sojourn has made her once more "at home" in Hong Kong.

Neither the paternal nor maternal land represents home for Hueying. Finally and ironically for her, since Hong Kong lies at the interstices of these two spaces, it is the space of exile yet a space where the exile can feel at home. The film constantly conveys a sense of Hong Kong as the land of the exile. In the end both mother and daughter can find cultural shelter within this terrain, a place where both China and Japan's cultural shadows fall, yet also a place where the exile can live in the lit spaces between these shadows.

The film, through Hueying's consciousness, charts the diasporic history of

alienation, exile, acculturation, return to the originary homeland, and final acceptance of the "other" space — if not quite "home," still a space where she now feels more "at home." Through visiting Japan with her mother, the daughter reaches a new understanding of the alienation which Aiko had experienced so acutely in earlier years, as she had to adjust to a different culture and society whose members would not forgive her for what her national (Japanese) homeland had inflicted upon a colonized part of China.

The mother's frustrations are laid upon the daughter. But it is the mother's resentment of her own daughter's patriarchal loyalties — to her paternal grandparents and her father — that shocks the daughter into a sense of compassion for the mother's alienation and suffering. On the other hand, it is the daughter's compassion that in turn (re)moves her mother from bitterness into a state of conciliation, forgiveness and eventual affection for her daughter. From a feminist perspective, then, *SONG OF THE EXILE* articulates the allegory of "home" as the recovered space of the originary, loving bond between mothers and daughters. The film's narrative constructs Aiko as a "strong" mother whose limits of hate (or love) and resentment (or forgiveness) can be tested. And the lesson the daughter, Hueying, learns through understanding her mother's plight is compassion. In fact, compassion is the quality which the heroines of other Ann Hui's films (such as *THE BOAT PEOPLE* and *STARRY IS THE NIGHT*) also attain in the course of their personal journeys.

Hueying has to renegotiate her relation with her mother through a clearer understanding of her own complicity (albeit that of a child and innocent youth) with the paternal grandparents' patriarchal chauvinism, a complicity made more complex by her own father's humanitarianism and her grandparents' indulgent affection for her. In other words, Hueying has to renegotiate her way home, where "home" is neither a physical nor a cultural space, but more a psycho-political one which delimits the mother-daughter bond on the microcosmic level and the daughter's grasp of one's mother-culture on the social level. The film, issuing so strongly from the filmmaker's own autobiographical experience, forces the viewer to rethink notions of what it is to "be at home" in a culture and to redefine notions of cultural loyalty, betrayal and respect in ways that do not privilege the experience of men.

SONG OF THE EXILE is especially poignant in contemporary times. The condition of being an exile has become more pervasive in the face of globalization, as many more people travel to a space other than the originary home to live, work or study. Many will also return "home" and find in this home-space the terrain of exile. At the same time, each exiled subject perceives her condition to be different since there are many different conditions of exile. For myself, in (re)viewing this film, I have come to realize that the exiled space is fraught with the difficulties of alienation and difference yet bears the promise of creative challenges.

And though the exiled cannot fully recover "home," s/he cannot leave home (alone) either. "Home" is not just a set of discursive formations and practices but also a nexus of affective ones. What comes through strongly in the film, because of both its autobiographical and cultural resonances, is that the exile feels a sense of sadness in losing the originary home, but also a sense of loss (therefore, melancholy, too) in returning to the originary "home." Thus the discourse/nexus of

"home" constructs the subject's "exile." "Home" only signifies when played against "exile" and vice versa.

NOTES

1. Rexroth, Kenneth and Chung Ling (1972), *The Orchid Boat: Women Poets of China*, pp. 3-5. The following verses from Tsai Yen's poem (3rd Century BC) articulate both the poet's anguish at her exile and her return to her homeland:

Verse 11

My Tartar husband loved me. I bore him two sons.
I reared and nurtured them unashamed
Sorry only that they grew up in a desert outpost.

Verse 13

I never believed that in my broken life
The day would come when
Suddenly I could return home.
I embrace and caress my Tartar sons.
Tears wet our clothes.

Verse 17, seventeenth stanza

My heart aches, my tears fall.
Mountain passes rise before us,
the way is hard.

Before I missed my homeland
So much my heart was disordered.

Now I think again and again, over and over,
Of the sons I have lost.
The yellow sagebrush of the border,
The bare branches and dry leaves,
Desert battlefields, white bones...
Once I have entered Chang An.
I try to strangle my sobs
But my tears stream down my face.

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Song of the Exile Border-crossing melodrama

by Tony Williams

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Hong Kong has now lost its status as a British Colony and returned to Mainland China, an event depicted in several ways in Hong Kong Cinema since negotiations began in September, 1982, between Margaret Thatcher and Beijing authorities. Scholars of Chinese cinema such as Esther Yau note that a future anterior time mode conditions many films produced between 1982 and 1992 where "return to the motherland" often appears, inflected by various moods of hesitation, resignation, passivity, and fear.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] But if the Tiananmen-Square-influenced, apocalyptic, doom-laden scenarios of John Woo's *A BULLET IN THE HEAD* (1986), *HARD BOILED* (1992), Tsui Hark's *A BETTER TOMORROW* 3 (1989), Mak Kit-Tai's *WICKED CITY* (1992), and Ringo Lam's *BURNING PARADISE* (1994) have not yet materialized, other films made before July 1, 1997, depict the return in a muted foreboding manner, using other genres far removed from these action and science-fiction films making explicit reference to reunification.

Ann Hui's *SONG OF THE EXILE*(1992) offers a melodramatic depiction of this foreboding. The film unites the political and the personal in a unique synthesis of history and fictionalized autobiography. Born in Manchuria during 1948 like her fictional protagonist Hueyin (played by Maggie Cheung Man-yuk), Ann Hui On-wah is the daughter of a Japanese mother and Chinese father. After she graduated from film school in London, she returned to Hong Kong in 1973 and worked as assistant to the late Taiwanese film director King Hu, who made significant contributions to the first New Wave of Hong Kong Cinema such as *COME DRINK WITH ME* (1965), *DRAGON GATE IN* (1966), *A TOUCH OF ZEN* (1968-70), *THE FATE OF LEE KAHN* (1970-1973) and *THE VALIANT ONES* (1974). Hui later became a director of television dramas and documentaries at Hong Kong's TVB, where she worked alongside other future talents of the second New Wave of Kong Cinema.

In 1977, Hui directed six episodes for the Independent Commission Against Corruption, a body set up to combat Triad bribery of Chinese and British police officers[2]. This investigation into police corruption became a *cause celebre* in contemporary Hong Kong society. The same scandal would receive cinematic treatment in Ng See-Yuen's *ANTI-CORRUPTION* (1975), David Lam's *FIRST*

SHOT (1992), as well as significant citation in SONG OF THE EXILE. Hui's uncompromising attitudes on two of these episodes, THE MEN and THE INVESTIGATORS, led to their withdrawal from public broadcasting. They have never been shown publicly again.[3] After shooting her first feature, THE SECRET (1979), partly inspired by Roman Polanski's THE TENANT, and a popular ghost comedy, THE SPOOKY BUNCH (1980), Hui refused to follow the commercial path of most of her contemporaries. She chose instead to concentrate on more realistic and melodramatic subjects often involving family relationships between different generations such as MY AMERICAN GRANDSON (1991) and SUMMER SNOW (1995) which won retired veteran Hong Kong actress, Josephine Siao Fongfong, the Best Actress Award at the Berlin Film Festival. Hui's third film, THE STORY OF WOO VIET (1981) featured future John Woo star, Chow Yun-fat in his first serious role. It dealt with the plight of Vietnamese boat people and the theme of exile, a motif followed up in BOAT PEOPLE (1982).

Although Viet Nam is absent in SONG OF THE EXILE, the film is commonly viewed as the final part of Hui's "Boat People" trilogy. Many Hong Kong films used Viet Nam as an allegorical representation of what might occur on July 1997. Other Ann Hui films often deal with transnational and trans-historical issues. In 1987, she directed THE ROMANCE OF BOOK AND SWORD in China, an adaptation of a Jin Yong story about a Manchu emperor and his unacknowledged brother. Anticipating certain themes in SONG OF THE EXILE, the plot involves the revelation that the emperor is really Han and not Manchurian. Hui also directed the sequel, PRINCESS FRAGRANCE, in the same year. During 1994, Hui returned to China to act as co-producer on Yim Ho's THE DAY THE SUN TURNED COLD, a bleak, naturalistic drama dealing with a son's conflicts with his parents and his ambivalent feelings towards a mother who may have murdered his father.

After completing Michelle Yeoh's last Hong Kong film, STUNTWOMAN AH KAM in 1996, Hui then directed three films in 1997 which further developed her interest in Chinese national identity. Like her earlier LOVE IN A FALLEN CITY (1984), EIGHTEEN SPRINGS is based on the work of thirties and forties Shanghai novelist, Eileen Chang. Chang became a figure of controversy in China after World War Two because of accusations made against her husband over collaboration with the Japanese occupying forces. Like SONG OF THE EXILE, EIGHTEEN SPRINGS uses cinematic melodramatic devices to analyze social and historical forces affecting the reconstruction of female identity in a changing era. Originally made for Hong Kong television, PERSONAL MEMOIR OF HONG KONG: AS TIME GOES BY, reveals Hui's functioning as actor, director, producer, and scenarist in a cinematic essay about growing up in Hong Kong. She brings together several friends from university days (including Democratic Party activist Margaret Ng) to examine key issues dealing with Hong Kong's colonial history. One scene involves Hui's discussing her own family history with her mother and its relation to SONG OF THE EXILE.

SONG OF THE EXILE eschews the violent realistic imagery of THE STORY OF WOO VIET and BOAT PEOPLE for a more subdued melodramatic treatment of an allegory of reunification, which in the film is depicted through the protagonist Hueyin's relationship to her mother and grandparents. As Patricia Brett Erens has pointed out, the film parallels mother-daughter treatments common in traditional literary and cinematic melodramas.[4] However, although SONG OF THE EXILE

contains several parallels to Western melodrama, there are distinctive Chinese cultural traditions which influence Hui's particular treatment of this script by Wu Nien-Jen (who has collaborated with leading Taiwanese director, Hou Hsiao Hsiu, on several films). In fact, melodrama has a long history in both Chinese literature and film.[5]

Film critics such as Nick Browne, Jane Gaines and Chuck Kleinhans, argue that ethnic and national melodramas require more than dominant critical interpretations of the genre, usually focusing on the individual and familial realms. [6] Browne comments that Western-influenced melodramatic theories which privilege the nuclear family and psychoanalytical interpretations of sexual difference and subjectivity often lose sight of broader cultural and social meanings. If we look at *SONG OF THE EXILE* in this regard, we see that the character Hueyin's sexual subjectivity plays little, if any, role in the plot; rather, the film emphasizes cultural, historical, and political factors. Hui's melodramatic treatment may actually parallel the treatment of the genre which Browne finds in the films of Xie Jin. Here, Browne says, the Chinese melodramatic imagination contains a

"mode in which gender as a mark of difference is a limited, mobile term activated by distinctive social powers and historical circumstances." [7]

Despite Hui's stated reservations concerning Chinese post-reunification censorship and her deliberate allegorical policy of casting mainland Chinese actors as brutal Vietnamese communists in *BOAT PEOPLE*, she was allowed back into China to shoot *THE ROMANCE OF BOOK AND SWORD* (1987) and function later as co-producer on Yim Ho's, *THE DAY THE SUN TURNED COLD* (1994).

In addition to using melodrama for social and political commentary, *SONG OF THE EXILE* also deals with a contemporary Hong Kong cinematic movement of "border crossing." Border-crossing films, according to Esther Yau, depict

"complex dynamics and symbolic structures that mark the cultural repositioning of a population whose ambivalence toward the colonial administration is accompanied by nationalistic sentiments toward China." [8]

Yau writes about two films — Johnny Mak's *LONG ARM OF THE LAW* and Yim Ho's *HOME COMING* (both 1984) — which depict local Hong Kong sensibilities regarding the expected reunification "as both appalling and rejuvenating." These two films, Yau says, mark the range of local sensibilities regarding the future return to China in terms of anxiety and discontent as well as nostalgia.[9] *SONG OF THE EXILE* contributes to this "border crossing" movement in that it contains the same ambivalence and syncretism characteristic of 80s Hong Kong Cinema. But *SONG OF THE EXILE* also operates on a much more complex level of hesitation. Like most Hong Kong films, it avoids direct representation of political issues, choosing instead to focus upon personal family dilemmas which are also inextricably bound up with cultural, historical, and political factors.

SONG OF THE EXILE's credits open against a white background. A leaf appears in blurred focus on the screen. The image then changes to another blurred shot, calling into question audience perception. The chimes of Big Ben begin and various indistinct sounds (including a military hand) slowly become audible before the

image focuses on bicycle wheels. Such a blend of images and use of blurred focus suggest Hui's technique. Hueyin has only a blurred perception of reality in England before she has to confront a more complex historical version of her identity and nationality. Movement begins on screen. Hueyin and two English friends cycle the Thames Embankment while we hear the off-screen sound of a busker singing Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Hui's choice of music does more than merely depict "swinging London." [10] Dylan's song is about surrender as well as freedom ("I'm ready to go anywhere, I'm ready for a fade"); it anticipates Hueyin's eventual surrender to accepting the complicated nature of her national identity. Dylan's song also questions the escapist nature of the freedom which the protagonist has had in swinging London, and it serves as a thematic counterpoint to Hueyin's desire to isolate herself from formative cultural and family ties which define her very personality.

The line, "I know that evening's empire has returned into sand and vanished from my hand," functions as indirect political commentary, escaping the notice of Hong Kong censors. As used by Hui, it may well refer to the redundant British Empire ready to cede the last remaining jewel in its crown of imperialist exploitation back to mainland China. *SONG OF THE EXILE* appeared when anxieties were at their height over Hong Kong's return to a China tarnished by the Tiananmen Square massacre. When we eventually see the Dylan-singing busker, he is playing outside the British Museum. Historically, this museum is the center of loot stolen from defeated cultures throughout the history of the British Empire (such as the Elgin Marbles which Tony Blair's Thatcherite New Labour government has refused to return to its rightful owners). Hui's choice of location is significant, especially when coupled with Hueyin's voice over: "I lived happily then." Graduating from a London university at the age of 25, Hueyin says she knew of the Viet Nam War and East-West tensions only from television newsreels. "For me life started then."

Although seemingly happy with her English girlfriends, Hueyin is an exile. Individual shots show her alone in a nightclub or framed alone in corridors and doorways which anticipate the film's later employment of Fassbinder-Sirk-style *mise-en-scene* depicting her similarly isolated mother during the mother's lonely life with Chinese in-laws in Macao. Although Hui is familiar with these other national cinematic melodramatic traditions, she employs them here in a subdued manner, preferring visual understatement to the typical melodramatic visual excess employed by Fassbinder and Sirk. Hui avoids primary color motifs common to many western melodramatic films and evokes instead somber, often shadowy, imagery. This treatment reinforces imagery common to certain Chinese melodramas, where individual and family problems are often shaped by and even subordinate to relevant class, social and historical forces and events, factors usually marginalized in their western melodramatic counterparts.

Although Hueyin believes herself free and adopts Western hairstyle and clothing, she is also her mother's daughter, even in swinging London, especially in terms of isolation from her surroundings. When the women return to their college dormitory, Hueyin discovers that her English friend has an interview with the BBC while she receives a rejection letter. This belongs to the time before the BBC employed ethnic newscasters such as Moira Stewart (a black Scottish woman who spoke in impeccable upper-class tones for "appropriate cultural representation").

This rejection letter is possibly Hueyin's first experience of institutional British racism. When Hueyin grooms her friend, Tracy, for the interview, the latter welcomes an offer of jewelry in unmistakable orientalist discourse.

"There's something mysterious and oriental about it. Do you think it will bring me luck?"

The dormitory sequence thus illustrates both the direct and the more subtle racism that would shape Hueyin's life there had she stayed.

Hueyin receives a phone call from her younger sister Huwei asking her to return home for the sister's wedding before Huwei emigrates to Canada. Although she initially refuses due to her desire to apply for British media jobs, Hueyin returns to Hong Kong to confront her mother Aiko Kwei-tzu (played by Japanese-speaking Taiwanese actress Shwu Fenchen) whom she has not seen for many years.

Aiko immediately begins dominating Hueyin, forcing her to wear a traditional red dress for the wedding and insisting she cut her long hair and have a perm. At this point, *SONG OF THE EXILE* appears to verge into familiar melodramatic patterns of combative mother-daughter relationships seen in western representations such as *IMITATION OF LIFE*, *MILDRED PIERCE* and *NOW VOYAGER*. But Hui will craft a much broader ethnic, historical, and political canvas to delineate the social, historical factors influencing the domestic and individual conflicts Hueyin and her mother face in the film.

The initial relationship between mother and daughter is one of alienation. It is less domestic than based upon cultural misunderstanding. In fact, it is as false as the NBC exclusive report about the Cultural Revolution in the Canton region of Guangzhou, which Hueyin watches on television in Hong Kong in her mother's apartment. The U.S. commentator describes the "changeless misery" of the Chinese situation. The news report stereotypically interprets the turbulent events of the 70s as one more chapter in the history of a miserable Asia. Personally isolated from a mother who dotes upon her younger sister, Hueyin believes her domestic relations are as unchangeably miserable and eternal as the generalized NBC description of the Cultural Revolution.

Upon reuniting with her mother and sister, Hueyin thinks in individualist Western terms, which presume the "natural" separation of mother and daughter. There is a long flashback of her memories of the past, seeing her mother as a "silent and reserved person" when they lived with her paternal grandparents in Macao, a Portuguese colony. In this sequence, where she appears as a little girl, Hueyin relates more to her grandparents than to Aiko, who appears as an isolated silent figure here. Grandmother openly criticizes Aiko in front of the older woman's friends for serving cold food and usurps her maternal authority over the child. She does not understand her daughter-in-law's cultural adherence to Japanese mores of silence and reservation before her in-laws. With a social conscience, Grandfather (Tien Feng) teaches Hueyin traditional Chinese folk songs and urges on her the necessity of "serving the people." He suggests she follow a future career as a doctor, following the example of Sun Yat-Sen. Hueyin thus clings to her nostalgic first memories of her close bonding with grandparents rather than to her mother, Aiko.

This poignant flashback, however, is not reliably "true." It contains several

contradictions which later become explicit. Hueyin's grandparents are exiles, as is she throughout the entire film. They live in Macao because conditions in mainland China are not safe for their return. Although grandfather idealistically speaks about "serving the people," he also refers to the fact that Sun Yat-Sen's political successors did not continue this noble tradition. Furthermore, despite emphasizing Chinese ideals, grandfather once wanted to become a western-style doctor. But his father forced him instead to study traditional Chinese medicine. And although Hueyin's grandparents dote on the little girl, traditional Chinese family life does not seem ideal. Even before we learn about Aiko's nationality, the way the grandmother demeans her daughter-in-law and the coercion the grandfather faced in terms of a career suggest problems with the Chinese identity that the small child enthusiastically embraced.

While Hueyin may believe, "I lived happily then" (as her first voice over lines in the British scenes state), her feelings rest on blurred illusions which need refocusing as pointed to in the first post-credits shot. In this film, as Akbar Abbas points out, the narrative unfolds in a series of flashbacks which initially appear contradictory but which eventually force both Hueyin and the viewer to reevaluate memory and experience. For Hueyin, such a reworking of her memories leads to personal reconciliation and historical understanding.[11]

Alienation increases between mother and daughter. Hueyin recalls an unhappy memory from Macao when Aiko cut her hair and unsuccessfully attempted to make her wear a Japanese-styled school uniform. Now the daughter has to submit to a perm according to maternal demand and act the role of traditional dutiful daughter at the wedding ceremony. The following evening Aiko watches a television report about the Cultural Revolution; that event's political turmoil between generations parallels the domestic tensions. Hueyin says she wants to return to London and again denies the relevance of these historical events to her own situation:

"I'm so tired of all these riots and wars."

Following an argument with her daughter, Aiko announces she wants to return home to Japan and die there alone. In fact Aiko had been abandoned by her daughter before. After the mother makes an unsuccessful attempt to phone her brother in Japan, Hueyin remembers the time when her father Cheung (Waise Lee) returned to Macao to take his family to Hong Kong since Aiko had found life unbearable with the Chinese in-laws. In that flashback, little Hueyin refuses to leave her grandparents. A bird's-eye shot shows Cheung and Aiko driving away from Macao while grandfather and the little girl stand at the window and he has to move Hueyin's reluctant hand in a farewell wave. The scene changes to show Cheung and Aiko on the Macao ferry to Hong Kong. However, Hui uses a shot of the sea not only to make a time transition into the next scene but to compare Aiko's feelings of abandonment by her daughter to the daughter's later feelings of abandonment by her grandparents after they chose to return to mainland China in 1963 — in "hopes of serving the people." As with Aiko, historical factors resulted in the teenage Hueyin's new exile.

In a flashback, we see the adolescent Hueyin similarly isolated in her Hong Kong school as she will later be in London. She entered boarding school because of a quarrel with her family, due to a bitter cultural misunderstanding about her family's "new" ways. Watching Aiko play mah-jong with friends who care little

about traditional Chinese female duties, she resents the fact that father expects her as daughter to cook the family meal while allowing his wife to live a life of indolence. For Hueyin, the last straw involves a family visit to the cinema. Rather than seeing the daughter's choice, WEST SIDE STORY, Cheung complies with Aiko's wish to see THE SEVEN SAMURAI, starring her favorite actor, Toshiro Mifune. Hueyin's refusal to go to the movies leads to a family quarrel and her desire to attend boarding school.

Later that evening, Cheung tells Hueyin an important fact which the teenager had not realized before — that her mother is Japanese. He speaks of the hard time Aiko had living in Macao, unable to speak a word of Chinese. Cheung obviously has decided to indulge his wife in compensation for the miserable existence she endured in Macao. Cultural and historical factors also influence these family tensions. Cheung informs Hueyin that he met Aiko in Manchuria at the end of the war. Thus, the traumatic nature of Sino-Japanese relations, a frequent motif in 60s and 70s Hong Kong Cinema, also influenced the way his traditional Chinese parents treated Aiko.

Hueyin now decides to accompany her mother to Japan. Like Hueyin's grandparents' idealization of China, Aiko also idealizes the country she has been exiled from. When Aiko meets her brother at the station and the two speak in Japanese, Hueyin ironically finds herself in a situation similar to her mother's in Macao since Hueyin can not speak a word of Japanese. When she asks Aiko to translate the initial conversation she has with her uncle, mother demurs:

AIKO. Life in a foreign country is hard.

UNCLE. Yes (non-committedly).

HUEYIN. What did Uncle say?

AIKO. He admires me.

However, Aiko allows her idealistic feelings to blur her perceptions of her family's changed circumstances. Like Hueyin's grandfather, Aiko, at first, wishes to cling to a past which is no longer relevant. She refuses to allow her brother to sell a family home and refuses to see their point of view, their desire to move to Tokyo to be near grandchildren. Aiko soon finds out that not only is the past a forgotten country but it is often a realm colored by illusion. She meets her old schoolteacher whose son died in the war. Schoolteacher tells Aiko that she hardly spoke to him when he was alive. But she now converses with his photograph day and night and takes solace in her substitute family of three cats. Aiko also wishes to see the younger brother she once doted on but now finds he's an ex-kamikaze pilot bitterly living in the past; he considers her a "disloyal" woman and refuses to see her.

Aiko now agrees to sell the family home, and she also expresses openly her family pride in her daughter Hueyin. In their last evening before departing Aiko bids farewell to her family shrine speaking in Cantonese for her daughter's benefit rather than in the Japanese she used for her first visit there. Both mother and daughter become closer having experienced new ways of understanding, and they come to terms with their personal exile which separated them for so long.

Earlier, the film showed the daughter's experience of Japan when on her own. Hueyin wandered out into the country and was chased by a farmer, who warns her in Japanese not to eat the insecticide-sprayed tomato she has picked up. Hueyin

attempts to speak to the farmer in English, a language he does not understand. The scene ends positively when the villagers bring her to the local schoolteacher who can speak English.

Although this sequence appears forced, it is integral to *SONG OF THE EXILE*. The villagers initially think Hueyin is Japanese. Believing her to be a visitor from Hawaii, they respond in the odd English phrases they have picked up over the years. "How are you?" "Hawaii?" When they discover she is Chinese, they ask, "What would a Chinese be doing here?" The scene then switches to an abrupt memory flashback in which Hueyin now understands the miserable nature of the existence Aiko had in Macao as a Japanese woman living there soon after the war. She remembers herself as a little girl, watching grandmother criticize Aiko in front of Cheung as being "cranky" and choosing to "hide in her room." The image returns to the present as the schoolteacher helps Hueyin to communicate, leading to reconciliation and friendship unlike the results of miscommunication in the past.

The sequence is idealized in terms of depicting an eventual understanding between historically-affected members of different races. But, as well as showing Hueyin's eventual understanding of Aiko's early cultural isolation which leads to closeness between them, it also reveals a Japanese country village where people understand the wider implications of a global community even when they do not speak the language. Unlike Hueyin's grandparents and uncle, the village community is not xenophobic. After an initial misunderstanding, they try to break down the cultural and linguistic barriers separating them from Hueyin. The comic village sequence foreshadows the more emotional rapprochement between Hueyin and Aiko. Mother and daughter have identities resulting from cultural, historical, and political forces which they must come to terms with. In this way, *SONG OF THE EXILE* certainly extends the melodramatic imagination beyond the individual and domestic to a larger historical realm.

In their final night at the Japanese family's bathhouse, Aiko now sees problems within a culture she formerly idealized. She speaks fondly of Hong Kong values and yearns, "Oh, for a bowl of hot soup!" as opposed to cold Japanese cuisine. When mother and daughter look out at an ocean liner at night, symbolizing their return to Hong Kong, the sequence begins with the camera turning in a semicircle from their backs to frame both in mid-close up. It introduces Aiko's memory of meeting Cheung in 1945 Manchuria. The sequence ends with the camera reversing its direction as if visually reinforcing Aiko's lines, "At every turn life has been different." She comes to terms with past and present, recognizing the complex nature of her own personal exile.

In Hong Kong, Hueyin is now working as a television producer in TVB. She edits documentary shots of the anticorruption demonstrations in Hong Kong society during 1973-1974, a sequence having deep significance for Hong Kong residents. During 1973, Hong Kong society was rocked by the revelation that many cops, including Chief Superintendent Peter Godber, were taking bribes from the Triads. This led to one of the most important criminal trials in Hong Kong legal history. It showed that British officials and police officers had betrayed the trust of Hong Kong residents. Many crooked British cops on the take in Hong Kong were known in slang terms as "filth." But in Hong Kong, the term meant, "Fail in London — Try in Hong Kong." The Godber affair was thus the first indication of the major

betrayal Hong Kong citizens would experience in 1982 when Margaret Thatcher callously disregarded their democratic rights and consigned them back to a government they viewed with suspicion and fear.[12] The colonial powers supposedly safeguarding Hong Kong's rights were really not acting in their interest at all. Like Ann Hui, Hueyin works on documentary material which anticipated the 1980s situation, and this filmic material revealed that Hong Kong citizens were to become exiles within their own country.

Aiko receives news that Hueyin's grandfather has suffered a stroke and urges her to visit him across the border in China. At night, Hueyin crosses a bridge connecting Hong Kong to the Cantonese city of Guangzhou, where her grandparents now reside. She is dressed like a traditional mainland Chinese woman. This is her last costume change in the film.

Throughout the film, Hueyin wears several distinctive costumes which signify the changing nature of her cultural identity. In "swinging London" she wears Carnaby Street type outfits. When she returns to Hong Kong for her sister's wedding, Aiko forces the daughter to wear a traditional, bright red, bridesmaid's dress. In Japan, Hueyin wears relaxed casual clothes, as she does during scenes showing her working as a producer in TVB. Aiko also wears different costumes. We first see her in modern seventies Hong Kong costume. Like Hueyin, the audience initially thinks she is Chinese until we learn her actual identity in one of the flashbacks. During her Macao period with her Chinese in-laws, Aiko wears a traditional, demure, forties Chinese female dress as opposed to her Japanese clothes worn immediately after the Japanese defeat. As Jane Gaines points out, costume can function as an important part of cinematic mise-en-scene, fitting characters like a "second skin, working in this capacity for the course of narrative by relaying information to the viewer about a person." [13] Although costumes in *SONG OF THE EXILE* function to represent interiority ("vehicles for the soul"), they do not resemble the opulent fashions that have symbolic and emotional weight in Hollywood melodrama. They function rather as cultural signifiers articulating a broader culturally and historically defined mise-en scene, determining (and often modifying) self-definitions of individual significance. In *NOW VOYAGER* (1942), Bette Davis changes costumes according to her individual belief in self-negotiation. But in *SONG OF THE EXILE*, Hueyin constantly renegotiates her identity and costume changes according to historical and social circumstances.

In visiting the elderly grandparents in mainland China, Hueyin enters a dark somber world which contrasts with the more brightly colored world of Macao. Grandfather has suffered a stroke following a brutal twenty-four hour interrogation by Red Guards, the cause of which was his attempt to send his granddaughter a book of traditional Chinese poetry. Despite his incapacity, he counsels Hueyin, "Do not give up hope in China." However, the scene is abruptly curtailed when a retarded boy whom Grandmother cares for literally bites the hand feeding him. As Erens and Abbas have noted, this act brutally contradicts the touching mood in these scenes and appears as an arbitrary intrusion. However, rather than seeing the boy's behavior as "a glimpse of the darker, more inexplicable side of human life that mocks our claims to understand it," [14] the scene's use of this character may be understood as incorporating an eruption of violent imagery of the kind found in the other two parts of the Boat Trilogy. Such violence unites the themes of the trilogy and suggests that reconciliation in 1997 may not be easy.

Both grandparents have idealized the nature of a mainland Chinese society that has rejected them. Their illusory refusal to confront the realities of a complex, changing China parallels that of Hueyin's xenophobic uncle in Japan. Hui sees the need for adaptability and change but also possible dangers in the future. One of the last scenes in the film shows Hueyin feeding her disabled grandfather while Grandmother feeds the retarded child. Such a fragile moment of peace may be fleeting in terms of a potentially hazardous future.

Hueyin has undergone many changes and identifications. When we last see her, she appears dressed like a traditional Chinese woman devoid of make-up; she is remembering nostalgically the lyrical nature of her past life in Macao with her doting grandparents. *SONG OF THE EXILE* operates as a culturally complex Chinese melodrama. Rather than emphasizing only domestic life or issues of gender and sexuality, the film focuses on the indissoluble nature of public and private life and the challenging issues of culture, history, and nationality which the protagonists can not avoid.

As I mentioned, *SONG OF THE EXILE* is the last part of a trilogy, which also needs to be seen in relationship to the earlier films. Analyzing diverse representations contained within 80s Hong Kong cinema, Li Chuck-To notes the different endings of Hui's Boat People trilogy. Both *THE STORY OF WOO VIET* and *BOAT PEOPLE* end with a sense of disillusionment with leading characters forced into the open seas. However, specific differences occur in the final scenes:

"But whereas in *WOO VIET*, a sense of aimless wandering is implied, in *BOAT PEOPLE* there is a sense of hope as signified in the freeze-frame shot of the young girl hugging her brother, both staring into the distance at dawn. On them lies the hope of all in the audience who feel they may be facing an impasse but who have not lost their will to live and therefore to hope." [15]

SONG OF THE EXILE concludes with the camera tracking toward Hueyin's weeping face as she remembers a past which will never return. After two shots of her former happy life as a young girl with her doting grandparents in Macao, the image dissolves to a quiet scene of Guangzhou at night and concludes with one of the bridge uniting Hong Kong to the mainland. The past recedes before a future whose consequences are highly uncertain.

NOTES

1. Esther Yau. "Survival and the Post-Colonial Dilemma," a paper presented at The Society for Cinema Studies New Orleans Conference, February 13, 1992.
2. See H.J. Lethbridge, *Hard Graft in Hong Kong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
3. See James Zung and Zhang Yuai, "Hong Kong Cinema and Television in the 1970s: A Perspective," Ed. Li Cheuk-to, *A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the Seventies: 1970-1979* (Hong Kong: The Urban Council, 1984), 15.
4. Patricia Brett Erens, "Border Crossings: The Films of Ann Hui," a paper presented at The Society for Cinema Studies Ottawa Conference, May 17, 1997.

Erens changed her presentation to concentrate on SONG OF THE EXILE.

5. See Li Cheuk-to, Ed. *Cantonese Melodrama: 1950-1969* (Hong Kong: The Urban Council, 1986).

6. See Nick Browne, "Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Melodrama," Eds. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill, *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 167-181; Jane Gaines, "Fire and Desire: Race, Melodrama and Oscar Micheaux," op. cit. 231-245; Chuck Kleinhans, "Realist Melodrama and the African-American Family: Billy Woodberry's BLESS THEIR LITTLE HEARTS," op. cit. 157-166.

7. Browne, 170.

8. Esther Yau, "Border Crossing: Mainland China's Presence in Hong Kong Cinema," Eds. Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, and Esther Yau, *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 181.

9. Op. cit. 198.

10. See J. Hobcrman, "SONG OF THE EXILE," *Village Voice* 36 (March 19, 1991): 51.

11. Akbar Abbas, *The New Hong Kong Cinema: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 38.

12. See Tony Williams, "Apocalyptic Chaos and TIGER CAGE," a paper presented at The Society for Cinema Studies, Ottawa, May 17, 1997.

13. Jane Gaines, "Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Story," *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, eds. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990), 181.

14. Abbas, 39.

15. Li Cheuk-To, "The Return of the Father: Hong Kong New Wave and its Chinese Context in the 1980s," *New Chinese Cinemas*, 167-158.

New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s

by Douglas Kellner

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From the early 1980s to the present, Taiwanese filmmakers have produced an excellent series of films to explore social tensions and problems in cinematically compelling and often original ways, blending social realism with modernist innovation. Out of this cinematic production, several world-class directors have emerged including Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Ang Lee. A series of films now exist worthy of international attention. This development is surprising since prior to the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema suffered heavy repression and was constituted as a highly propagandistic and/or commercial cinema with few distinctive products or directors.[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

The recent Taiwan cinema is "new" in that it carries out a rebellion against previous genre cinema (its own and Hollywood) and attempts to produce a socially critical and aesthetically innovative cycle of films appropriate to explore contemporary Taiwan society. It may be an exaggeration to claim with Fredric Jameson that the films of the Taiwan cinema constitute

"a kind of linked cycle more satisfying for the viewer than any national cinema I know (save perhaps the French productions of the 20s and 30s)."[2]

And yet as a cycle of national cinema, the new Taiwan cinema has produced an impressive succession of films comprising a distinctive national cinema, one increasingly visible in the international arena.

In this study, I shall discuss new Taiwan cinema as a linked set of probings of Taiwanese history, society, and identity that explore the conflicts between tradition and modernity and that deal with the concerns of the present moment — a conjuncture fraught with problems and perils, but also possibilities. I have adopted the term "new Taiwan cinema" rather than the standard "Taiwanese new wave" because the cycle of films of from the early 1980s to the late 1980s, standardly described as "new wave," has generally been said to come to an end.[3] But — as I argue — this cycle of 1980s films described as "new wave" has produced the preconditions to develop a new Taiwanese cinema which transcends the parameters of the earlier "new wave" films, a cinema that is highly visible in the 90s and is rich with possibilities that transcend the earlier movement.

I also resist the term "new wave" to describe these films because I find the very

concept of "new wave" problematic. The term began circulating with the *Cahiers du cinéma* promotion of a set of French films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Henceforth, "new wave" was a marketing term delineating something new, allegedly worthy of consumption. As Peter Wollen suggests, in this context "new wave" became a term used to promote fresh entries into the international cultural market.[4] Some Taiwanese directors — most notably Ang Lee — do produce films for a global market and deploy themes and cinematic techniques from world culture.

However, the best of the new Taiwan cinema stands out as distinctively Taiwanese, dealing with contemporary Taiwanese realities. This new Taiwan cinema developed a shared style and a set of concerns and themes. It has attempted to develop a new type of national Taiwanese cinema, which seeks to define Taiwanese history and identity and to deal with current social problems previously ignored or suppressed in the national cinema and in Taiwanese culture at large. Finally, the metaphor of "wave" itself is ambiguous, signifying a natural oceanic phenomenon's sudden erupting, reaching a crescendo, making a splash, and then fading away without a trace. Such an image surely provides a dubious metaphor for cinematic production and history.

Rather than seeing the 1980s Taiwanese films simply as a "new wave," as an artifact in film history, we should understand them as cultural and political interventions, as probings of Taiwanese society and history, and as self consciously creating a distinctly national cinema. I will accordingly focus on what now appears as the "heroic" period of the new Taiwan cinema, the 1980s. At this time, filmmakers received expanded freedom to make films and explore cinematic style and social themes, and as a result, they produced a new type of political cinema distinctly focused on Taiwanese problems and identity. During the 1980s, Taiwan's major filmmakers shared certain concerns in their subject matter, sometimes collaborated on each others' projects, and produced a body of work of lasting significance. It appears, however, that Taiwan's audiences tired of the 80s filmmakers' themes, styles, and complex and challenging films. Thus, a more heterogeneous, hybridized cinema emerged in the 1990s, influenced both by the most popular forms of global culture and by postmodernism, which itself emerged as a global phenomenon.[5]

Rather than finding the 80s new Taiwan cinema an exhausted venture, I consider it as productively opening the way for varied, diverse national film production which in the 90s joined a proliferating global film culture. As a film movement, New Taiwanese cinema of the 1980s deserves to be studied and experienced. Many of the films that I discuss have high aesthetic and political quality and have received recognition within world cinema. In particular, the films under inquiry here helped create a new, more open and democratic, Taiwanese public sphere, providing a cultural forum to discuss national problems. As such, this cinema remains fascinating as a case study in the politics of culture and in the use of cinema to promote progressive social transformation.

TAIWANESE CINEMA

Taiwan had no native cinema before its liberation from Japan at the end of World War Two. For some centuries before the Sino-Japanese war, Taiwan had been dominated by China; after China's defeat Japan colonized Taiwan from 1895 until

1945, the year of Japan's surrender in World War Two. For the first half of the century, therefore, Japan controlled Taiwanese cultural production, including cinema, and did not let an indigenous national cinema flourish. Most films exhibited were from Japan, China, or the United States. And Japanese censors tightly controlled these and any other films which might include Taiwanese participation in their production.[6]

After Japan's defeat, China once again assumed control of Taiwan, which became subject to cultural domination by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, the Kuomintang (KMT). Since national cinemas, like national literature and culture, shape national identity, in modern times colonized countries like Taiwan could not create their own independent cinemas. Instead, they became markets for the colonizing countries' exports. Thus Taiwan — suffering China and Japan's hegemony in the twentieth century — did not create a national cinema until the Chinese Nationalist government in 1949 under Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang established Taiwan as the Republic of China. The KMT regarded Taiwan as part of greater China, as the real China, and the island nation was established as a China waiting for the People's Republic's overthrow. Such a nation sought mainly to preserve the heritage of the past, entombed, for example, in the National Museum of Taipei which held all the national treasures that Chiang Kai-shek's armies looted from the mainland and carried to Taiwan. Taiwan's political ideology, oriented toward restoring the past, militated against building a specifically Taiwanese cinema, one that would deal with Taiwan's past and present conflicts.

For its first several decades, the dominant postwar Taiwanese cinema was exclusively government-financed and controlled. Chiang Kai-shek's regime used it as a propaganda vehicle or for harmless diversion. As entertainment, the institutions of film production churned out innocuous comedies, melodramas, Kung Fu films and other genre artifacts. All of Taiwanese culture suffered from the Nationalist Party regime's heavy-handed censorship. The government shunned both aesthetic innovation and any probing of Taiwan's history or social tensions, producing a largely escapist cinema.

Until the new cinema of the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema remained primarily a genre cinema, utilizing traditional genre codes without any distinctive national traits or stylistic innovations. When Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, his son who succeeded him began to allow more liberalized cultural expression, evident in the development in the early 1980s of a new Taiwan cinema. Hong Kong cinema's success led the Taiwanese government to promote film as an industry, which helped produce a renaissance of Taiwanese cinema. In fact, the overall climate for cultural expression improved during Chiang's son's reign. Politically, he allowed an opposition party to form in 1986, and in 1987 he terminated 40-year-old martial law. Following his death in 1988, liberalization continued. Currently a struggle is underway for greater democratization and freedom, but these tendencies were visible in and perhaps inaugurated by the 80s cycle of films.

Early examples of new Taiwan cinema were government-financed but nonetheless exhibited a freedom of expression and social criticism not evident before the 80s thaw. Because the filmmakers needed to take in account possible government censorship or denial of funding, they also operated within limited parameters in regards to social criticism and opposition. In the following sections, I shall examine

several key films and directors from this movement. My goal is to discuss the construction of a national cinema and to offer a case study of how a national cinema might serve as a cultural forum. In the 1980s, various Taiwanese film directors explored issues of national identity and dealt with pressing current political and social problems. Moreover, 80s Taiwan cinema presents an occasion to explore the tensions between tradition and modernity since the decade's key films negotiate this transition, just as many films of the 1990s deal with the tensions between the modern and postmodern eras.

THE NEW TAIWAN CINEMA

The first evidence that the Taiwanese "new wave" comprises a coherent movement comes with two anthology films about contemporary Taiwanese society. *IN OUR TIME* (1982) features four short films by directors who will later distinguish themselves, including one by Edward Yang, later a major figure. This inaugural film is followed by the anthology *THE SANDWICH MAN* (1983), which goes much further in probing beneath the surface of Taiwanese life and which constitutes something of a breakthrough in utilizing innovative cinematic techniques to explore contemporary problems. Based on stories by author Chun-ming Huang, *THE SANDWICH MAN* constitutes a three-part anthology which reveals the influence of Taiwan's increasingly influential rural literature movement, seeking to preserve stories from Taiwan's agrarian past and to chart the ways that urbanization has an impact on Taiwanese society. Hou Hsiao-Hsien and other directors of the new Taiwan cinema are deeply attracted to such rural stories and ambiances, which they use to capture the uniqueness and specificity of the Taiwan experience as well as aspects of their own life histories.

In *THE SANDWICH MAN* anthology, three short films explore 60s Taiwanese society to depict allegorically the island's economic development and the human costs such capitalist development entails. The films combine critical realism with modernist aesthetic techniques, attempting to use cinema to explore current problems and to develop a new type of cinematic style to do so. The three-part episodic films constituting *THE SANDWICH MAN* thus produce something of a "national allegory" of a certain stage of Taiwan's history.[7] Such allegories require at least a certain degree of critical "social realism," in Lukács' sense which portrays typical characters in characteristic social situations so as to delineate the existing class, gender, and social structure, as well as forces of domination and oppression, existing problems, conflicts, and struggles, and historical developments.[8] Yet such critical realism need not, as I argue throughout this study, preclude modernist aesthetic innovation which seeks new forms, languages, and styles to express the specificity of national experience and problems.

THE SANDWICH MAN's first episode, "Son's Big Doll," directed by and starring Hou Hsiao-Hsien, takes place in 1962 and shows poor rural folks who migrated to the city struggling for economic survival. The main character, played by Hou himself, lives in a shantytown with his wife. He works as "a sandwich man," who dresses as a clown and carries a billboard advertising a local cinema's features. Flashbacks show his hustling the job and his wife's getting birth control because they cannot afford a child. In the film's present, however, they now have a child who loves to play with his clown-dressed father. Yet others ridicule the "sandwich man" and he is obviously tired of his job; moreover, his boss doubts whether hiring

a sandwich man to promote films is profitable.

Ever hustling, the main character persuades his boss to let him ride a bicycle carrying a large sign on the grounds that it would attract more customers. The boss reluctantly agrees. The man happily no longer has to wear a clown uniform and makeup. But when his son no longer recognizes the father and cries when he sees him out of uniform, to please his son the man dons the clown costume and make-up, thus becoming "Son's Big Doll."

The episode deploys Hou's trademark of using a static camera and long shots and long takes held steady throughout entire scenes to explore the characters and social environment under scrutiny. The shots depict the sandwich man and his family in relation to their underclass surroundings, often showing the father isolated and sad — the tragic clown struggling to survive in a hostile world. Other times the long shots depict intimacy between husband and wife and parents and children, showing their attempts to achieve dignity and happiness in a poor urban environment. All of the slum's characters have left rural communities to try to make it in the city, and there they form something of a community again in the absence of any stable social structures and institutions.

"Son's Big Doll" shows the scarcities faced by the poor in Taiwan in the early 1960s. When a doctor provides some birth control pills to the protagonist's wife, who wishes to postpone birth until they can afford a child, we see how Taiwan appropriates a sort of modernization to master its poverty. In the energies of the father/clown to earn money, we see the forces that will make Taiwan's economic miracle possible. And in the loving scenes between husband and wife and father and son, Hou makes clear the stable familial structure that enables Taiwan's economic boom. In its touching, sweet story, the script contributes to a national allegory about Taiwan's economic development.

The next episode, "Vicki's Hat" directed by Zeng Zhuan-Xiang, shows two young salesmen traveling from village to village and selling a Japanese-made pressure cooker. Here, the script delineates 1960s Taiwanese development when Japanese products, sales techniques, and corporate structures dominated the Taiwanese economic landscape. The salesmen meet resistance everywhere, especially from village people who wish to stick to traditional ways of cooking and who are suspicious of modern commodities. Although unhappy selling the Japanese product, the vendors face pressure to increase sales, and we see them discussing ways of overcome resistance to their product, ironically striving to follow Japanese sales techniques.

Their sales efforts and entrepreneurial drive depict allegorically the energies that were to enable Taiwan to achieve a high level of economic development from the 1960s to the present. But "Vicki's Hat" also presents the costs of that development. One salesman befriends a young girl named Vicki who always wears the same hat. One day when he takes her hat off, we see an ugly red tumor on her hairless head. At the same moment, the film cuts to a scene showing the Japanese pressure cooker exploding and critically injuring his partner. The story thus deals with economic development's destructiveness. Here it is seen as forcing individuals to exploit others, and the entrepreneurs risk losing their innocence, humanity, and even their life in the process.

Indeed, Zeng represents the force of economic determinism in the film, depicting the characters overpowered by economic forces. The story allegorizes unrestrained Taiwanese capitalism's triumph by showing the consequence of its destructive effects. Likewise, in his later film, *A WOMAN OF WRATH* (1987), Zeng shows a woman overpowered by the twin forces of patriarchy and tradition, struggling to control her environment but victimized by powerful social and cultural forces.

The first two episodes in *THE SANDWICH MAN* depict conforming to the pressures of a developing economy while struggling to live in it. The third episode, "A Taste of Apple" directed by Wan Jen, satirizes the late 60s fascination with U.S. culture. Opening black and white scenes depict crowds and the U.S. embassy, perhaps reminding audiences of an attack on the embassy during that period. But the images shift from newsreel footage to depicting in a slow-motion sequence a Taiwanese worker's being hit by a car driven by U.S. military. As the camera slowly pulls back, the scene shifts into color, emphasizing the worker's blood and injury.

The rest of the film contrasts U.S and Taiwanese characters. It traces the gradual process through which the worker's family accepts his injury — especially when they learn that the North Americans will handsomely compensate the family. The social contrast appears across a play of visual images: the large and mysterious U.S. citizens and the shorter Taiwanese; the crowded and poor slums and the open-spaces of the U.S. embassy and hospital; the darkness of Taiwanese urban scenes vs. the U.S. hospital's shining white light and decor.

The final scene shows the injured man's family in the hospital room enjoying an apple imported from the U.S. — a symbol of U.S luxury and of Taiwanese fascination with U.S products and culture. Conservative critics have complained that the episode presented the Taiwanese too negatively, and the resulting uproar even led to deleting this key end scene where the children taste the imported apple. [9] Such a critical controversy highlights new Taiwan cinema's relative daringness. It is willing to present its society satirically and critically and to dissect social tensions in a way never attempted by previous conservative, escapist films.

THE SANDWICH MAN allegorizes 60s economic progress through the hustle for survival, the appropriation of Japanese products and business techniques, and finally the fascination with U.S. culture and dependence on the United States. The stories deal with how Taiwan society has adapted itself to a modern capitalist, world economic system. The films use innovative cinematic techniques to tell seemingly "slice-of-life" stories. Subsequent new Taiwan cinema would show audiences real people dealing with real problems, a cinema far removed from the previously dominant film styles of costume drama, kung fu spectacle, banal comedy, and "health realism" (a conservative film style that attempted to depict the present from the perspective of a "healthy" realism).[10] Thus, the new cinema broke with its own cinema's previous genre conventions as well as with the dominant conventions of Hollywood film.

New Taiwan cinema exhibits a shared effort to develop a distinct cinematic language appropriate for a national cinema. Several directors, especially Hou and Edward Yang, use a fractured narrative style with fragmentary scenes, unconventional episodic narrative cuts, and often a complex storyline that forces the viewer to construct the narrative and put the pieces together to produce a reading of the film. The films rarely have a conventional beginning, middle and

end, or standard Hollywood pacing. Sometimes scenes run for an extremely long time and, in Hou's case, employ a static camera. In Yang's case, often the characters are placed at the margins of the frame or even remain off-frame, and dialogue often overlaps and does not always correlate to the images. Both Hou and Yang in their feature-length films engage in temporal jolts, cutting from a dramatic scene to the situation as it has evolved months or even years in the future. Here the audience is forced to construct what has happened in the meanwhile so as to figure out what produced the changes they see. Thematically, Hou's and Zeng's episodes in *THE SANDWICH MAN* deploy flashbacks to show characters making a transition to new socio-economic situations. Many of the films of the new Taiwan cinema therefore require an active viewer for what Barthes (1975) calls a "writerly" text, in contrast to the "readerly" texts of conventional literature and Hollywood cinema which offer up predigested meanings and are quickly consumed.

New Taiwan cinema favors outdoor locations over studio ones. It utilizes natural rather than artificial lighting as it explores ordinary people's real living and working spaces. Long takes and deep focus shots allow viewers to explore the details in unfamiliar social environments, ones cinema rarely depicted before. Often the directors cast non-professional actors and script dialogue in a way in which the characters' dialects point to their specific region and class. Problems of the underclass, women, youth, and other marginalized and oppressed groups take on a new dramatic importance, as do the peculiar issues in constructing Taiwanese national identity.

The films tend to combine social realist with modernist aesthetics. Not only do socially typical characters represent specific social classes, regions, or groupings, but the use of real locations evokes a sense of contemporary social reality. Yet modernist aesthetic innovations include sound and image juxtapositions, fragmented narratives, flashbacks and temporal dislocations, and open-ended, often puzzling endings. Indeed, this cinema, as a political cinema, reveals the artificiality of Lukács' pitting realism against modernism since 80s Taiwan cinema has effectively borrowed from both — including Brecht, Fassbinder, Altman, and other directors who themselves combine modernism and realism.

In *THE SANDWICH MAN* both Hou and Zeng use deep focus shots and a fixed camera, with characters coming in and out of the frame. Wan Jen uses a detached fixed camera to capture American and Taiwanese interactions and to juxtapose the world of the urban poor to the modern antiseptic U.S. hospital. In his feature films, Edward Yang constructs highly complex images where characters are often at opposite sides of the frame, separated by objects; the people sometimes glide out of the frame while speaking. In this way, Yang's camera work and framing suggest human alienation and objectification in an urban environment, and he shows a determining social reality to exist off-screen, shaping the visually depicted actions.

In "A Taste of Apple" an American, a Mandarin-speaking policeman from the mainland, and two Taiwanese women speaking the local Fukka dialect try to converse in a driving rain, highlighting cultural differences and the obstacles to forging something like a Taiwanese national identity. Furthermore, in the major plot line, the injured man's wife does not speak Mandarin and her daughter must constantly translate for her. Language marks the characters' identity and points to the island's hybridized, contested cultural identity.

The films of the new Taiwan cinema are also highly personal and exhibit a high degree of collaboration, pointing to the film movement's shared parameters and ideology. As noted, the major directors produced film anthologies together. Hou performed the major male role in Edward Yang's *TAIPEI STORY* (1985) and mortgaged his house to finance and produce Yang's *THE TERRORIZER* (1986). The highly-respected Taiwanese film historian and critic Hsiung-ping Chiao notes that Hou Hsiao-hsien's "A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE was based on Hou Hsiao-hsien's own life; *SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S* (1984) on the film's writer Chu Tien-wen, and *DUST IN THE WIND* on the screenplay writer Wu Nien-chen." [11]

The anthology films *IN OUR TIME* and *THE SANDWICH MAN* and subsequent key films present some of the defining hybrid elements in the Taiwanese national experiences and the components of and obstacles to forging a national identity. By the 1980s, Taiwan's unique amalgam of modern and traditional society had undergone rapid modernization and contained native Taiwanese and various generations from and strata of Chinese mainland culture. Thus, different languages and cultural forms competed for people's loyalty and made national identity contested. Taiwan was a colonial country, occupied by Japan for the first half of the century and by factions from mainland China during the second half, following the Japanese occupation. In addition, in the 1950s Taiwan opened itself to globalization and an international consumer culture. In particular, in the 50s and 60s, U.S. culture permeated the island since the U.S. sent troops, provided loans which sparked the economic boom, and imposed U.S. products in the marketplace.

Not until the 1980s did artists have the freedom of expression to articulate past political and historical realities and present complexities. Thus, Taiwanese cinema — and the culture at large — needed to clarify the contemporary moment and its historical origins as the nation careened into an uncertain future. The new Taiwan cinema was soon to provide a major national epic director in Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and several other cineastes would produce an impressive body of work dealing in original and compelling ways with the problems of contemporary Taiwan and its unique historical experience.

HOU HSIAO-HSIEN'S EPIC DRAMAS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Beginning with a 1982 co-directed feature *GREEN GREEN GRASS OF HOME*, his work on *THE SANDWICH MAN* in 1983, and his films *THE BOYS FROM FENG KUEI*, *SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S* (1984), *A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE* (1985), *DUST IN THE WIND* (1986), *DAUGHTER OF THE NILE* (1987), *CITY OF SADNESS* (1989) and *THE PUPPETMASTER* (1993), Hou Hsiao-Hsien produced a series of slice-of-life melodramas and historical epics which probed the personal histories of Taiwanese citizens and provided materials for a national history and cinema. His intense focus on everyday life provides an epic quality to ordinary people's lives, and his characters embody Taiwan's turbulent history and conflicts.

Hou has developed a personal cinematic style that combines realist focus on everyday life with modernist cinematic innovations and a distinctly individual vision. His stylistic devices involve long shots and long takes, often with deep focus, that explore personal relations and people's ties to their culture and environment. He sees an epic quality to the dramas of everyday life where typical Taiwanese characters experience the dynamics of their island's history. Hou stands as the major figure in developing a distinctly Taiwanese cinema with its own style, subject

matter, and themes.

Particular national cinemas often define themselves against dominant cinema and create their own cinematic languages and thematics. While Hollywood film deploys quick editing, alternating long, middle, and close-up shots, as well as shot/reverse shots which explore, usually in close up, characters' reaction to the scenes, Hou uses few edits and few close ups, preferring long shots and long takes to allow an extended time and a panoramic view in which to explore a situation. Although he probes specific family histories, including his own and those of his collaborators, his films allegorically present Taiwan's mutable, complex history. He is both the most prolific and one of the best-known Taiwanese directors, winning several major prizes in international film festivals.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien's films *THE BOYS FROM FENG KUEI* (1984) and *SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S* (1984), deal with growing up in Taiwan, as do many of his later films. *A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE* (1985; hereafter *TIME*) deals with the director's own childhood. Born on mainland China in 1947 in the Hakka community of Guangdong, which speaks a unique dialect and has its own distinct traditions, Hou emigrated at an early age with his family to Taiwan, where his father became a government official. The film explores a small town family's coming to terms with its environment and dealing with the hardships of sickness, death, and the pains of growing up.

The story focuses on Ah Hao-ku and his relations with his grandmother, parents, siblings, and Taiwanese friends. Opening scenes use long shots and long takes to explore the modest family house and the relationships between the boy and his family. The grandmother especially dotes on the boy because a fortune-teller told her he would grow up to be important. The sister is bitter because although she studied hard and did very well on a difficult high school entrance exam, she must attend a preparatory school for teaching college. Later the mother tells her how unhappy the father was with his first born, a girl, who was sickly and died young. In contrast, her brother prepares to go to high school and university. Obviously, the male child lives a privileged life as his parents' pet. Thus, the film subtly presents the subordination of women in a traditional, patriarchal Chinese milieu.

The family speaks the Hakka dialect within the house, while the boys largely speak the Taiwanese dialect with their native island friends. The local Taiwanese merchants cannot even understand the grandmother's Hakka dialect. The children all speak Mandarin Chinese in school, and the daughter often speaks Mandarin in the family. In particular, the narrative choice to have the character Ah Hao-ku speak the Taiwanese dialect indicates the boy's identification with Taiwanese culture and indifference to mainland Chinese culture. He often sings native Taiwanese songs and has no interest in Chinese Nationalist politics. He symbolizes the younger generation's integration into politics and culture as Taiwanese. That generation is uninterested in the Chinese mainland, the return to which obsessed the Nationalist Party and many mainlanders who came to the island with the Nationalists.

The father explains to the children about the political events mentioned on the radio, but the children don't really care. In one scene, the radio announces a famous Nationalist general's death and broadcasts a memorial. While Ah Hao-ku and his friends are playing billiards in a pool hall, an old Nationalist soldier hears

the memorial and says they should quit playing to show their respect. When Ali Hao-ku insults the old Nationalist, a fight breaks out. Obviously, the younger generation shows no interest in the Nationalist Party (KMT) past. In the film, schoolboys joke about the phrase, "recovering the homeland." They immerse themselves in the present rather than in future glories or China's past, while mainland China obsesses some of the older generation, such as Ah Hao-ku's grandmother, who wants to return to her old village.

In the film the older generation generally remains focused on China and out of touch with life on Taiwan. When the father's autobiographical diary comes to light after the mother's death, the daughter reads it out loud to her siblings. The father wanted to settle in Taiwan only briefly, expecting to return to China. He accordingly bought cheap furniture. He refused to buy his wife a sewing machine though he eventually relented. He closely followed Nationalist politics and never really identified with Taiwan.

Taiwanese culture is genuinely hybridized, containing an amalgam of many different cultures, ranging from various Chinese traditions, Japanese or European colonizers, and U.S. and global culture. *TIME* unravels the conflicting experiences and traditions which inform contemporary Taiwanese life, and the narrative indicates how complex it is to form a national identity out of competing traditions. Taiwanese people's cultural experience is also diasporic, with Chinese from the mainland periodically emigrating to the island and island residents often returning to the mainland, going to other Chinese enclaves throughout the world, or emigrating to the United States. Hou's films take up the theme of how this dislocation produces suffering.

TIME is largely a family tragedy with the father's dying of tuberculosis and then the mother's dying of cancer some years later. At an early age, the children must come to terms with their parents' deaths and assume personal responsibility for their lives. The senile old grandmother frequently gets lost, trying to "cross the next bridge" to her old Chinese village, and the film ends with her death. During the later scenes, the grandmother is shown sleeping on the floor in the midst of activity. She eventually passes away, dead for days in the middle of the house before her death is discovered, her body partly decomposed. This tragic figure represents allegorically the discarded older Chinese generation, never assimilated, always out of place, and never at home.

But the film primarily focuses on Ah Hao-ku's growth and coming to maturity, so it can be read as a *bildungsroman* about Taiwan of the 50s and 60s. The boy has his first sexual initiation with a prostitute, who has to pay him because it was his first experience. He joins a gang which engages in violent clashes with an opposing gang. He has a crush on a local girl, but she tells him that he should focus his attention on his university entrance exam-which he does.

Thus, *TIME* shows the immigrant Chinese generation becoming part of Taiwanese culture, taking on an identity as Taiwanese. *TIME* also shows the forces of modernity transforming the island. An early scene shows the installation of electric wires. The children grab a piece of discarded metal as a piece of magic — though they sell it the next day to the scrap metal man. The boy's father dies during an electrical blackout. In several scenes, electrical wires fill the image; and the film uses the radio to broadcast the era's key political events. In particular, one radio

report notes that the Taiwanese have shot down two Chinese communist MIGs, referring to the constant political tensions between Taiwan and mainland China, tensions that could at any time explode catastrophically for Taiwan.

In general, the radio in Hou's films speaks the voice of the Nationalist Chinese KMT colonizers. Frequently it is the voice of doom, broadcasting news of outside events that tragically impinge on the Taiwanese. The radio thus stands as a force of modernity, bringing modern mass communication into a traditional society. But it also represents the voice of the dominant powers since the Chinese Nationalist regime tightly controlled broadcasting until the 80s democratization movement. In fact, the films of the new Taiwan cinema began this democratization movement by beginning to criticize Nationalist hegemony and to produce more critical versions of Taiwan's troubled history.

Modern modes of transportation and communication bind Taiwan up into a Westernized industrial society. The railroad is another icon of modernity frequently used in Hou's films to portray modern modes of transportation. Indeed, in *TIME* transportation changes from bicycle-drawn buggies, dominant in the 1950s, to motorbikes with a few cars in the background. The railroad tracks in Hou's films represent the passageway from rural to modern. In a similar way, Hou's episode in *THE SANDWICH MAN* deploys a flashback that shows the main character and his wife on the train as they come from the countryside to their new destination in the city. Another film, *DUST IN THE WIND* (1986) opens with long takes of trains winding through the countryside and passing through tunnels, not only symbolizing modern migration to the city, but perhaps also the plunging into personal tragedy and the dark night of the soul.

DUST IN THE WIND focuses on a young boy and his childhood sweetheart who leave the village to seek their fortunes in the city. The boy finds work there, first in a printing establishment that also runs a cinema while the girl works in a garment factory. She cuts her hand in an industrial accident and cannot afford a doctor although the boy loans her money. He quits his job to work as a messenger, but his motorbike is stolen and his prospects are bleak. These disasters almost drive him to theft, but he is dissuaded by the girl. When both return to their small towns to visit their families, the boy leaves for his obligatory military service.

During this stint, the girl marries, breaking the boy's heart. Once his military service is over, the boy returns to his village alone where he encounters his grandfather in the field, complaining about this year's crop and engaging in the conversations they have always had. This view of rural life, in which the young are alienated from both tradition and modernity, points to an unchanging but disappearing tradition in the face of shifting fortunes and uncertainty brought on by a modern, complex social order.

Despite the inherent drama in *TIME* and *DUST*'s situations, Hou's pace is slow and probing. He delicately uses the camera to explore the environment. High drama remains downplayed. The films focus instead on the mundane details of daily life, the typical pains of growing up, and the subtlety of family relations. When the characters undergo painful experiences, their sufferings, mundane as they are, exemplify the suffering of the Taiwanese people. Such national suffering would be the subject matter of Hou's later films as well.

Hou's unique camerawork and editing style have elicited spirited debate concerning its progressive versus reactionary features. The long takes and long shots, often with deep focus cinematography, allow him to depict many aspects of the social environment. Some critics see this as the creation of a democratic cinematic language, which allows the spectator to interpret the events, reflect on the characters and actions, and construct his/her own meanings. Hou's cinema clearly eschews Hollywood's more manipulative style with its rapid cutting, fast pace, ideologically loaded scenarios, and high tech special effects.[12]

Yet Hou's style might be said to naturalize traditional Taiwanese culture, making its conventions seem natural and good. Since his films focus intensely on family life, they could be read as an ideological defense of the ancestral family and of traditional Taiwanese culture in the face of an ever-encroaching, corrosive modernity. Yet his films are rarely judgmental and have neither a celebratory nor critical effect. Instead, they force the audience to reflect on the images and construct their own readings. *SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S*, for instance, opens with a naturalistic scene of high school girls in identical uniforms, singing traditional songs. The images could be read as indicting the Taiwanese educational system's authoritarianism and conformity, or simply as nostalgically evoking customary high school days.

Likewise, one can read into Hou's films a critique of traditional family and authority, as well of contemporary culture. Hou's films do not defend or respect tradition and patriarchy in the way that Ang Lee's "Life with Father" trilogy does, although the films also do not attack patriarchy in the way Wan Jen's *AH FEH* and Zeng's *WOMAN OF WRATH* actively do. In *DUST IN THE WIND*, the grandfather's homilies to his grandson reproduce traditional values but are clearly ineffectual. In *SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S*, the grandfather is harshly authoritarian. The contrast between urban and rural, traditional and modern — at the center of Hou's films — comes to us in an understated and rather nonjudgmental way, forcing us to render our own judgments on the characters, situations, and contrasts portrayed.

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New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s

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Hou's best known film is his internationally acclaimed historical drama, *CITY OF SADNESS* (1989). Focusing on the destinies of a Taiwanese family from 1945 to 1949, *CITY* probes the forbidden history of Chinese Nationalist brutality against the Taiwanese in the years following their "liberation" from Japan. Whereas the drama of *TIME* was internal with disease and death coming from within the family, in *CITY* tragedy comes from outside, from the fateful historical and political events which victimize families and citizens. The film uses as a backdrop the Nationalist government's (KMT) slaughter of native Taiwanese in February 1947. Not only was this topic previously taboo, the film specifically deals with the origins of the KMT's oppression of the people of Taiwan, showing Chinese Nationalist officials and various Chinese groups after World War Two replacing the Japanese as the dominant economic and political forces.

The background to the action occurs after the departure of the Japanese in 1945, where the film shows the beginning of Chinese Nationalist attempts to take control of the economy and society and how these process affected different people. The film depicts many Taiwanese attempting to profit from the drastic political changes, either by allying themselves with the Chinese Nationalists and their cronies or by engaging in crime or black market businesses. In the infamous February 28, 1947, incident government agents attempted to arrest an old woman selling black market cigarettes in order to enforce a government monopoly. A crowd of people rushed to her defense; the agents shot into the crowd, killing at least one bystander. The next morning, an angry crowd demonstrated in front of Taipei's government building, and troops fired on the crowd, killing many and setting off an island-wide revolt that lasted for months, leading to further repression.[13][[open notes in new window](#)]

CITY OF SADNESS opens in 1945 at the time of Japan's defeat and Taiwan's reunification with China. The family patriarch, old Lin, has four sons, whose sufferings will constitute the drama. The eldest, Wen-heung, is a businessman-gangster who runs a local nightclub and a shipping company. The second son, drafted by the Japanese, is missing in action in the Philippines. Although the family considers him dead, his wife continues to run his clinic and believes he will come back. The third son, Wen-Leung, sent by the Japanese to serve as an interpreter in Shanghai, is branded a collaborator after the war, tortured, and driven insane. In early scenes he is shown being strapped down in the hospital and in later scenes appears as a voiceless figure of suffering. The youngest son, Wen-ching, rendered deaf as a result of a childhood accident, communicates through

means of a notepad. A photographer, he eventually renounces this occupation when overpowered with suffering.

The early scenes show the Japanese leaving the island and portray them as individuals, some decent and sympathetic. As Chinese mainland businessmen arrive to exploit new markets and economic possibilities, Hou realistically depicts the corruption that has permeated Taiwan's economic life to the present. In one striking scene, shot in a long take with Hou's trademark static camera, a group of businessmen from different parts of China converse in three different languages with two interpreters. The eldest son, Wen-heung, does not speak Mandarin; the Chinese do not speak the local Taiwanese dialect. Thus the groups' differences remain encoded in linguistic oppositions, which persist and which subvert Nationalist ideology that Taiwan is naturally part of China.

Mandarin becomes Taiwan's official language, imposed by the nationalist KMT government. Throughout the film, Mandarin radio newscasts or voices of Mandarin-speaking Chinese soldiers threatening or arresting the native Taiwanese portend tragedy for the islanders. In particular, news of the February 28, 1947, incident comes to the family through the radio with the KMT Chinese nationalist dictator, General Chen Yi's first announcing that a few conspirators and communists began a riot and were suppressed. This scene is framed in long shot, devoid of characters, with an empty window looking out on a dark night, where sinister clouds and lightning foretell a coming storm. Obviously Hou employs symbol and allegory here to portray the coming tragedy of the Taiwanese people, but he does so from the perspective of radio's serving as the voice of doom. The radio brings the disturbing political news into quiet, small towns, creating cities of sadness throughout the island.

Hou has been criticized for not depicting in a fuller and more gripping fashion the events of the February 28 incident, but he does present many pieces of the historical situation which the viewer must assemble.[14] Indeed, the discussion concerning the film and what was previously known by many as "unofficial knowledge" of the events provided something of a history lesson for the Taiwanese people, albeit one that they must fabricate for themselves, using the film to promote better public historical understanding. Thus, like the avant-garde works of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet, Hou's history lessons require an active audience, able to put together the pieces of the narrative into an account of historical events and to construct their own interpretations of the era.

Since the Nationalists have not released crucial documents concerning the event, complete evidence has never been available. Hou's indirect narration stays faithful to the actual situation since it is still not clear what happened in the 1947 slaughter of the Taiwanese by the Chinese Nationalist government of Chen Yi (Chiang Kai-shek was still in China battling Mao-Tse Tung and the communists at the time). Hou does have a character early in the film express dismay that the Nationalists chose a "bandit" like Chen Yi to govern. Another character expresses the native Taiwanese sentiment that the island long suffered from successive Japanese and Chinese occupations, both of which the Taiwanese have experienced as imperialist invasions. Another character notes that Taiwan is becoming a company and not a government, alluding to the KMT and their cronies' increased control of the economy. In fact, *CITY* presents several discussions among characters about the

Chinese Nationalists' monopoly of sugar, tea, and cigarettes. They say that sugar and tea were scarcer than under the Japanese, thus signaling the cause of the February 28 events, which erupted when Chinese Nationalist authorities arrested a woman selling black market cigarettes.

A later radio broadcast alludes to the subsequent events: Chen Yi promises leniency to those who would surrender and announces a curfew for the whole of Taiwan. The scene, once again, comes from an empty house with a window looking out to the dark night; this time there are more clouds and lightening, and distant thunder signals the political storm unfolding. Subsequent scenes show the KMT troops breaking into houses and arresting citizens, searching for and arresting guerrilla fighters in the mountains, and executing young Taiwanese incarcerated in prisons. The official number killed in the episodes is set between 18,000-28,000 dead, though the figures could run much higher. Many more were imprisoned for long sentences.[15] Also, as Hou's film dramatically indicates, after the episode the people suffered prolonged state terrorism with the troops' arresting and executing dissidents.

Hou is thus the first to deal with a previously forbidden topic in Taiwanese history, involving mass slaughter of the people by the Chinese Nationalist government. His strategy is to focus on the fate of one family, multiplying their sufferings as an allegory for the Taiwan in the early days of Nationalist rule. In addition, in the images and scenes described above, the deaf son, Wen-Ching, conveys his observations of the slaughter in Taipei, which he sees in a visit to the city. He describes his experiences in prison through notes, which are written and shown on the screen in large calligraphic characters set against a dark background, interrupting the drama with messages about fate or history, almost in the mode of silent-film intertitles. The youth's deafness symbolizes the difficulty of describing such painful experiences. And his anguish symbolizes that of the Taiwanese people when forbidden to communicate their sufferings, feelings, and lived experiences of oppression.

By the film's end, the eldest son has been subjected to endless suffering and is finally killed fighting with a collaborator. The deaf son is arrested, after marrying and having a child. The film ends with the old patriarch Lin, his now silent and mad son, and the female members of the family preparing a dinner. The scene, shot in usual static long shot, reveals the family's devastation, endless suffering, yet resilience. They carry on their everyday life despite the tragedies.

CITY OF SADNESS presents an intricate view of family and society that attempts to convey the historical situation's full complexity. While the film dramatically presents the sufferings inflicted by the mainland Nationalist Chinese on the Taiwanese, the film also shows Taiwanese mobs' hunting and heating mainland Chinese. In one scene, a prolonged deep-focus shot depicts several people beating and kicking a man. One of them yells, "So you think you Chinese have come to Taiwan to become emperors!" In another scene, while entering a train the deaf son, Wen-ching, is accosted by a group of Taiwanese thugs who question him about his identity. When he cannot answer because he is deaf, the group assumes he is mainland Chinese and would have beaten him except that a friend of his shows up and explains that he is deaf and doesn't understand them — and that he is Taiwanese.

Such scenes show the Chinese as victims of Taiwanese hatred and violence, depicting the dual victimization of the historical situation. Because Hou developed these kinds of complexities, some writers criticized him for justifying the immense Nationalist repression. They said the film reduced unequal levels of violence and oppression to the same level of critique. In fact, Hou also expresses a subtle critique of the Taiwanese resistance. In an important early scene, he depicts in detail a haiku written by a young Japanese girl who commits suicide because she believes that life should stop at its highest point, as when a cherry blossom drops to the ground after maturity. Taiwanese youth seem impressed by the haiku, suggesting, in retrospect, that the youth who join the resistance are seduced by Japanese death fetishism.

Other scenes depict Wen-ching and his intellectual friends who join the Taiwanese resistance movement as naive idealists, living in a world of illusion. One young man reads Marx while others champion grandiose ideals of Taiwanese independence or integration with "greater China." Such visions that can be read as depicting the youthful resisters' living in a world of fantasy and ideology, blind to the structures and forces of power. In these and other ways, Hou thus presents a rather negative image of Taiwanese resistance to Nationalist oppression.

Yet in his defense, one could argue that Hou on the whole distances himself from partisan positions around the passionately debated and contested Taiwanese history depicted in *CITY*. His camera seems simply to explore the era's events from a detached point of view. Obviously, in the late 1980s Hou could go only so far in criticizing the Nationalist KMT regime when the government still controlled and censored film production and distribution. Moreover, Hou's complex cinema precludes a one-sided propaganda effort that solely presents one point of view or interpretation. His characters and the events depicted represent different perspectives; the characters express differing opinions. Hou thus offers what might be described as a multi-perspectivist cinema, showing the events of February 1947 and their aftermath from a variety of perspectives, so that the spectator can grasp the complexity of the events and how the events affected different individuals and groups. Of course, one can still argue that Hou's choice of images in telling the story discloses a certain partisanship and authorial point of view.

On the whole, Hou's static camera, long shots and deep focus shots, often held for an entire scene, patiently explore the environment and politically charged events without commentary. In one striking scene, he depicts young Taiwanese partisans taken from a prison cell to be shot; the camera stays with the deaf son, Wen-ching, in his prison cell. As the spectators hear the shots, Wen-ching cannot. The guards then come and take Wen-ching away. An extreme long-shot with static camera and deep-focus follows Wen-ching slowly walking down the corridor, perhaps to his execution. Such a scene has an excruciating effect since we fear the worse. The memory of that tension remains even as the narrative eventually reveals that the elder brother has obtained freedom for Wen-ching, and the long trek down the corridor leads to his release.

Hou's static camera and long shots might be contrasted to the Japanese director Ozu's camera style. While their camera work has some formal similarities, their use of the fixed camera has different aesthetics and effects. Both have a camera work free of optical effects, and both use a static camera, long takes, and few pans, fades,

or dissolves. Ozu, however, evokes a still, quiet dignity as he consecrates everyday life, lovingly lingering on tradition's details and rituals and deeply personalizing his characters. Ozu's long takes evoke stability, harmony, and a veneration for family. Ozu often shoots traditional Japanese family scenes with the camera at the seated family's eye-level. This visual tactic elevates family members, often sitting on floormats, to almost epic grandeur and dignity.

The stillness of Ozu's scenes betray a predilection for the personal, for detail, and for a balanced, secure, traditional life. He measures personal family life against impersonal urban life, the private sphere against the public sphere, tradition's stable rituals against modernity's dynamism, always to the benefit of the former term as a value. For Ozu, family life, tradition, and personal relations take on concrete shape while urban modernity remains abstract, portrayed in his films by distanced images of smokestacks, factories, railroads, cities, and masses in motion.

Ozu's still camera and long takes with horizontally oriented framing stand in contrast to Hou's more dramatic, more critical eye in using a set camera and long takes. Hou's frames contain more dramatic action than Ozu's, including violence. The camera eye creates highly dynamic situations which explore the familial or the personal sphere's exploding into violence, or the camera shows destructive external forces intruding into the private sphere. Hou depicts tradition and personal life as furiously invaded by external social forces, with everyday life a site of disorder and contestation. Often action spills out of the frame. Characters suddenly leave the spectator's vision and shortly reappear, sometimes bloodied or hurt. Other times events and people suddenly break into the frame with the static camera capturing the moment's shifts and mutations. Eschewing Ozu's stillness and harmony, Hou shows a radically disharmonious environment. His cinema thus provides critical visions of Taiwanese life and society that provoke discussion of its history, transformations, and current problems, thus helping produce a national cinema and a democratic public sphere in which cinema serves as a vehicle of cultural and political debate.

FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY AND BEYOND: VICISSITUDES OF THE NEW TAIWAN CINEMA

A distinctively national cinema requires artists to develop a specific national style and subject matter with its own problematics, themes, and effects. Style plays as important role as subject matter in this project, and different types of films point to different forms of society and ideology. As has been frequently noted, the close ups and shot-reverse shots of the classic Hollywood cinema articulate the ideology of individualism central to capitalism and the U.S. ideology, while images of the masses, dynamic montage editing, and stories focused on social transformation in the early Soviet cinema articulate communist ideology and a vision of a young and dynamic Soviet society's undergoing progressive change. As we have seen, the New Taiwan Cinema reveals a society in turmoil, undergoing dramatic transitions and threatened by internal and external forces.

New Taiwan Cinema of the 80s thus has a genesis and a trajectory that provide a glimpse into the development of a national cinema. Here the films have as their subject matter specific Taiwanese problems about the transition from tradition to modernity with its attendant conflicts, and they take up these themes in an aesthetically engaging and innovative fashion. Many directors in Taiwan contribute

to this project. While Hou Hsiao-Hsien presents epics of everyday Taiwanese life, often focusing on the private sphere in a distinctly rural milieu, Wan Jen is especially adept in exploring urban tensions and the conflicts confronted by those who migrate from rural to urban life. The startling contrast between old and new Taiwan is the subject of Wan Jen's 1983 epic *AH FEI*, or *RAPE SEED*. Wan Jen's film depicts traditional identities coming into conflict with an urban life, emphasizing the situation of women.

Taiwan's economic boom's downside is portrayed in Wan Jen's films *SUPER CITIZEN* (1986) and *FAREWELL COAST* (1987). In the former, a young man from the country comes to Taipei to search for his sister from whom he has heard nothing during the past year. Beginning in a tenement slum, the young man travels through the city's lowlife, where street hustlers sell fake Rolex watches and other contraband, gangs fight each other, and the ubiquitous sex businesses ply their trade. The young man befriends a rich teenage girl and a young prostitute as he and a hustler who knew his sister search for her through a trail of clues leading to restaurants, dance joints, and brothels. Told that the city has over 2,000 sex establishments, the young man abandons his pursuit and decides to leave the city. However, the final scene shows him getting off of the train at the last minute to pursue the joys of city life.

Wan Jen uses modernist techniques to capture Taipei's vitality and neon glitter through quick cuts, a fluid camera, and visual explorations of previously unseen elements of life in the capital, thus exposing its underside to critical scrutiny. His next film *FAREWELL COAST* (1987) presents an even more pessimistically critical look at Taipei's underworld. A young man is pulled into crime and then murder. He falls in love with a beautiful young prostitute who sells herself to a brothel to pay off his debts. When the young man tries to buy her contract from the brothel owner, he kills one of the bosses' thugs in a fight. A crime syndicate that the young man willingly affiliated himself with failed. Now on the run from both criminal assassins and the police, the star-crossed lovers flee through Taiwan. The girl begins to suffer from cervical cancer, caused by multiple sex partners, and dies on the beach. A powerful morality tale, the film exposes the dangers of the underworld economy, and the ubiquity of crime and violence on the island.

These films of Wan Jen are reminiscent of Oshima's films, which explored the dramas of youth in urban and underclass environments. *FAREWELL COAST* also recalls Godard's star-crossed lovers in some of his early French new wave films, although Wan Jen's romanticism and melodrama are far more extreme, almost to parody. Interestingly, Wan Jen uses the conventions of French new wave romanticism to explore aspects of the contemporary Taiwan urban experience that had been hitherto neglected.

Other new Taiwanese cinema directors also explore the particular problems of the present moment. The films of Lu Kang-Ping, like those of Wan Jen, take the standpoint of outsiders, those who do not share in the Taiwanese affluence and economic boom but who live in the city as marginal characters. These are people who usually suffer their small indignities and deprivations silently, fatalistically accepting their lot.

In *MYTH OF A CITY* (1985), Lu Kang-Ping presents a group of kindergarten workers caught up in an adventure which reveals the poverty of their usual lives

and which presents the director an opportunity to take some sly digs at contemporary Taiwanese society. It is a school bus driver's last day at work. On a whim, he drives off to the seashore with the school's cook, a young teacher, and a busload of children. Facing an unhappy retirement, he seeks one great moment of happiness, which he finds on the road with the children. They encounter an aboriginal family, who invite them in for a feast, and then some young motorcycle riders, with whom they camp by the sea. It is as if only outsiders can sustain humanity in an urban industrial society. The film's moments with these marginal communities offer utopian images of communal happiness in a harshly competitive, individualistic, and asocial milieu.

Lu Kang-Ping's *TWO ARTISTS* (1990) focuses on two sign-painters ordered to cover over the giant, bare breasts of a woman they'd painted on a billboard. In black-and-white flashbacks, one painter reflects on his youth and failure to make it as a serious artist. The younger signboard painter reflects on his aboriginal heritage; in hallucinatory color images he relives his childhood past and people's myths. Documentary-like footage of aboriginal rights rallies at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Plaza highlights the issue of aboriginal people's treatment and rights, since aboriginals are often neglected in Taiwanese culture and are an oppressed minority, like indigenous peoples in the Americas and elsewhere.

Chang Yi's 1984 film *JADE LOVE* and his 1985 *KUEIMEI, A WOMAN* explore women's situation in Taiwan, using melodrama to depict personal relations. Generally, Taiwanese films that focus on women's changing situation do not explicitly express a feminist ideology, but they critically explore women's lives in traditional Chinese and contemporary Taiwanese environments. The films show modernity as improving women's position slightly, but they also demonstrate how traditional constraints on women's freedom and independence persist, often taking on new forms. Changing gender roles in contemporary urban life is the focus of a major filmmaker, Edward Yang, who has produced the most telling investigations of the triumph of urbanization in Taiwan.

Whereas the films of Hou Hsiao-Hsein, Wan Jen, Lu Kang-Ping, and other directors of the new Taiwan cinema depict conflicts between traditional and modern, rural and urban culture, Edward Yang presents the hegemony of urban modernity and the new forms of identity and culture now dominant in Taiwanese society. While Hou's films are primarily rural in focus, with Yang we witness the dominance of city life, with tradition and rural life left only as cultural signs within modern commodity culture. The national allegory about modernization which I have traced across this body of films reaches its culmination in Edward Yang's work, which uses rigorously modernist aesthetic techniques and an highly unique style, look, and feel to present a vision of contemporary Taiwan.

Yang's film *THAT DAY ON THE BEACH* has a highly enigmatic and complex narrative about the suicide or disappearance of a woman's husband "that day on the beach." Two women meet in a modern city restaurant and reminisce. The one woman tells of her tragic marriage and the loss of her husband. The film jumps back and forth between past and present, exploring social relations in the context of Taiwan's transition into a modern, globally oriented society. Yang's narrative structure is highly experimental. His juxtapositions between past and present indicate the current situation's discontinuities and novelties, just as his modernist

style points to a new kind of cinema and cultural text in Taiwan.

His succeeding TAIPEI STORY (1985) depicts Taipei's undergoing rapid urbanization, and the film traces the effect of that. As Yang put it:

"My purpose is very straightforward-using film to make a portrait of Taipei. I am going to explore the changes occurring in Taipei in recent years, and how those changes affect every citizen of Taipei."[16]

The script develops a relationship between Lon, played by Hou Hsiao-Hsein, a cloth merchant who lives in Taipei's old-town, and Chin, a career woman who works in a new-town corporation and moves into a modern apartment. In the opening scene, as Chin is moving into her apartment, she asks Lon's opinion about how to arrange furniture and so on. But Lon remains lost in his private fantasies, replaying the Little League baseball game in which he played when his team won the world championship.

TAIPEI STORY traces out the difficulties which Lon and Chin and their families and friends have to deal with. In particular, it shows Lon's inability to come to terms with the new Taipei. Using Antonionesque tracking long shots of the urban environment, Yang presents images of a city where buildings and objects take over and dwarf human life, which seems drained of its significance. He frequently uses internal framing to surround his characters with window bars, blinds, or architectural structures, presenting images of individuals trapped in a constructed, artificial environment.

THE TERRORIZER (1986) is perhaps Yang's most highly developed and acclaimed depiction of urban modernity. The film was awarded a prize at the Locarno Film Festival in 1986, was pronounced the "most original film of the year" at the London Film Festival in 1987, while receiving Taiwan's Golden Horse award as best picture the same year. The film is probably the most original and relentlessly modernist of all of the films I have reviewed. It is surely the most akin to the European art film, which obviously influenced its complex aesthetic. Antonioni, for instance, is an obvious and admitted influence.

The highly ambiguous narrative is convoluted with several overlapping storylines. To the question "Who is the terrorizer?" of the film's (English) title, the answer is that the terrorizer could refer to any number of the film's characters or the city itself. Throughout the film, Yang inserts images of a giant, egg-shaped, gas tank, as if the city could explode at any minute. The ending remains open-ended and gives rise to a number of interpretations.[17] Fredric Jameson, for example, argues that the ending's indeterminacy establishes the narrative's postmodern rejection of interpretive "depth" and indicates that the film could be read as a pure play of signs without any meaning or depth.

While I have some sympathy with this reading, I find Yang so strikingly modernist that I prefer the more modernist reading that the image is a polysemic signifier that functions as part of the director's complex view of urban modernity. In fact, I have found few signs of postmodern aesthetic strategies in any of the Taiwanese films or directors of the new Taiwan cinema of the 1980s. In my reading, THE TERRORIZER adopts a modernist style that requires an active reader to process the events and to produce their meaning. Yang's cinematic style itself is distanced,

cold and detached. He analytically dissects the character's lives, interactions, and environment. Yang frequently mismatches images and sound, cutting from one character and scene to another without warning and seemingly without motivation. This device replicates the fragmentation of the character's own lives and the accidental connections between them that will only become more evident as the narrative progresses.

Properly speaking, I would argue, it is not until the 1990s with the films of Ang Lee and a wave of young Taiwanese directors that postmodernism enters the Taiwanese cinema. Ang Lee's 90s films, for instance, play with more hybridized and postmodernized identity, negotiating not only the complexities of Chinese/Taiwanese identity but also the diasporic, global identity of Westernized Taiwanese, such as the Taiwan-American characters of Lee's *PUSHING HANDS* (1991) and *A WEDDING BANQUET* (1993), or the Westernized daughters in *EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN* (1995). These films posit conflicts between younger Westernized children and their traditional, patriarchal fathers. In his "Life with Father" trilogy, Lee clearly sides with the fathers so that the trilogy arguably reconstructs the patriarchal order, with younger men and women coming to accept and revere the old patriarchs. Lee renegotiates the tensions between tradition and (post)modernity in such a way to valorize the father. Each of the three films indicates that the old, traditional ways and patriarchal order have become obsolete, now superseded and rejected by the younger representatives of the new, (post)modern generation, who seem to accept Western contemporary values, roles, and institutions. In each case, the old father seems irrelevant to this order and, especially in the first two films, obsolete and slightly comic. In each film, however, the patriarch redeems himself, becomes sympathetic and human, and eventually re-establishes the patriarchal order.

The Lee dramas thus renegotiate the tensions between tradition and modernity to the benefit of tradition, or at least preserving patriarchal authority. Thus Lee's films create, if one wishes, a *postmodernity* that combines premodern, traditional and patriarchal codes with contemporary, global, cultural forms. The "Life with Father" films thus enact the Father's Triumph; they redeem the old patriarchy in the face of gay and women's liberation, modern commercial values, and a hybridized and global, postmodern, economy and culture.

Yang's *THE TERRORIZER*, by contrast, depicts a life where atoms of urban alienation are accidentally thrown together and in which various permutations and combinations of the interacting atoms may produce destruction and violence. He figures an urbanscape without community, without tradition, without vitality, and without hope of individual or social transcendence. Such depictions can be read to represent a Taiwan frozen in the grips of urban modernity, or more broadly to represent urban modernity itself. Yang presents a much more highly critical vision of contemporary Taiwanese society than does Ang Lee; thus Yang's work more aptly highlights the critical and politically radical project of the new Taiwan cinema.

IN CONCLUSION

Critics generally agree that the new Taiwan cinema reached its end by the 1990s. Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Wan Jen, Zeng Shuan-xiang, and other directors had investigated Taiwanese history and probe their own lives and experiences for

insight into the larger parameters of the Taiwan experience as a whole. The 80s directors had explored the tensions between tradition and modernity, the urban and the rural, and the specific conflicts in contemporary Taiwanese life. Especially urban problems are thoroughly depicted in the films of Edward Yang, Wan Jen, Lu Kang-Ping, and others. Yet Taiwanese audiences have not fully embraced the new cinema. Audiences continue to turn largely to genre film escapism which Hollywood, Hong Kong, and its own film industry are happy to produce and distribute. Ang Lee's films remain highly popular, attracting much larger audiences than Hou's and Yang's films. Younger viewers are eager to see their own youth cultures and identity politics portrayed rather than view biographical explorations of Taiwan experience. In fact, young viewers seem to be not especially interested in the erosion of tradition or past history.

Nonetheless, the new Taiwan cinema has become an international success with its directors' winning many prestigious international awards, and especially Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang's becoming internationally famous. A government wishing to promote Taiwanese culture and profit from exports has remained willing to help finance products by the directors of the new Taiwan cinema. There was a lull in government support for the 80s directors, since in the early 90s it was supporting new directors and cultural voices, some of whom have achieved international success. But as the 1990s has progressed, the major directors are again able to find financing, too.

In retrospect, we should recognize the important contribution of the new Taiwan cinema in creating a world class cinema and in helping to create a Taiwanese public sphere where critical questions could be raised about Taiwanese society. Yet the new Taiwan cinema has political limitations. Because of continuing censorship and funding problems through the now "heroic" period of the 1980s, there were limits as to how far the filmmakers could go in criticizing the government, as Hou found out when his *CITY OF SADNESS* was subjected to government censorship, but then released only when it won international acclaim. In particular, no films have, to my knowledge, dealt with the complex and problematic relation between the United States and Taiwan, although many have depicted the impact of Americanization on the island.

Moreover, no major film of the new Taiwan cinema has dealt with the problems of the industrial working class, or conflicts between labor and capital, though certainly sharp criticisms appear in the films of Yang and others against the capitalist corporation, an icon of an alienating urban modernity in many 80s films. While some films deal with women's oppression, few women directors emerged in the 80s, and feminist and other alternative film cultures are only now emerging in the 90s. Moreover, as far as I know, Ang Lee's *WEDDING BANQUET* is the first film to deal with homosexuality. And the only film I discovered that deals with Taiwanese aboriginal people is Lu Kang-Ping's *TWO ARTISTS* (1990). Thus the new Taiwan cinema has omissions and silences, just like the earlier cinema. Nonetheless, the 1980s cinema has opened the way for critical explorations of marginalized groups and has established a politically and socially critical national Taiwanese cinema that continues to develop and evolve in response to the current challenges of Taiwan society and the global economic and political order.

NOTES

[Editor's note: We wish to thank an excellent www site on CITY OF SILENCE for the stills used in this essay. The site is at UC Berkeley and is a model of what collaborative film scholarship on the Internet can be at its best.
<<http://cinemaspace.berkeley.edu/>>]

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1. On the political economy of Asian film, see John Lent, editor, *The Asian Film Industry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) and on the history of the Taiwanese film industry, see Ru-Shou Robert Chen, *Dispersion, Ambivalence and Hybridity: A Cultural-Historical Investigation of Film Experience in Taiwan in the 1980s*; Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1993.

2. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1992), p. 120.

3. See *The Death of New Cinema* (Taipei: Tang Shang Publishing Company, 1991) and Chen, op. cit.

4. Cited in Jameson, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

5. On postmodernism as a global cultural phenomenon, see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) and Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (London and New York: Macmillan and Guilford Press, 1991); *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997) and *The Postmodern Adventure* (New York: Guilford Press, forthcoming).

6. In this section, I am drawing on Chen, op. cit.

7. The term "national allegory" has been introduced by Fredric Jameson in his article "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), pp. 65-88; it is utilized in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, op. cit. The concept refers, as I am adopting it, to narratives that capture allegorically typical characters, situations, and events that present the life of a nation as a quest for national identity. National allegories chart the impact of modernity on tradition in developing countries and the production of new types of society where the traditional and the modern exist in conflictual and evolving configurations. I will make clear the relevance of the concept for reading Taiwanese film in the course of this study.

8. See Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1972); *Essays on Realism* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1980) and *Realism in Our Time* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964). I will argue below, however, against Lukács' opposition between realism and modernism.

9. Chen, op. cit., p. 124.

10. The term was introduced in 1963 by the manager of the government-sponsored Central Motion Picture Company, Kung Hung, who promoted the concept of "health realism" as a guideline for filmmaking, which was to "reveal the bright side of social reality" and "to promote the good qualities of humanity such as sympathy, care, forgiveness, consideration and altruism" (cited in Chen, op. cit. p. 66). The term was supposed to distinguish a positive and "healthy" cinema from the lurid naturalism of a social realism that dwelt on the negative and unhealthy aspects of experience. Interestingly, the term "social realism" was used later to promote films, mostly set in underworld milieus, which featured explicit sex and violence (see Chen, p. 71). I, by contrast, am using the term "social realism" in Lukács' sense to describe films that address existing problems, issues, and conflicts with typical characters and forms of behavior in familiar social environments.

11. Hsiung-ping Chiao, "The Emergence of the New Cinema of Taiwan," *Asian Cinema*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (March 1990: 9).

12. On *The Classic Hollywood Cinema*, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). On the contemporary Hollywood cinema, see Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988).

13. For a historical account of the February 28 events and their aftermath, see George Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965) and the documents assembled in Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, *The 228 Incident: A Documentary Collection*, Vol. 1 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1992).

14. Critical views of the film are found in Mi-Zou and Liang Xing-Hua, editors, op. cit. and are discussed in Chen, op. cit., pp. 133-141.

15. See Chen, op. cit., 112f.

16. Chiao-Hao Chang, "An Interview with Yang De-chang," *World Cinema Weekly* 254 (March 1985): p. 60.

17. See, for instance, Jameson's reading in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, op. cit., 114ff.

TAIWAN FILMOGRAPHY

The following list represents key films of the 1980s new Taiwan cinema that I watched for this study. Many are available on video with English subtitles.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien

1982, co-director, GREEN GREEN GRASS OF HOME

1983 episode in THE SANDWICH MAN, "Son's Big Doll"

1983 THE BOYS FROM FENG KAU
1984 SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S
1985 A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE
1986 DUST IN THE WIND
1987 DAUGHTER OF THE NILE
1989 CITY OF SADNESS
1993 "THE PUPPETMASTER" — Part of the director's trilogy of generational sagas spanning the years 1900 to the present and including CITY OF SADNESS and Hou's upcoming film, A MAN NAMED PUTAO TAILANG.

Edward Yang

1983 Episode in "IN OUR TIME"
1983 THAT DAY ON THE BEACH
1985 TAIPEI STORY (Oing-me-zhu-ma)
1986 THE TERRORIZER (Kong bu fen zi)
1991 A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY

Wan Jen

1982 "A Taste of Apple" in THE SANDWICH MAN
1983 AH FEH
1986 SUPER CITIZEN
1987 FAREWELL COAST

Lu Kang-Ping

1986 MYTH OF A CITY
1990 TWO ARTISTS

Chang Yi

1984 JADE LOVE
1985 KUEI-MEI, A WOMAN

Zeng Shuan-xiang

1983 "Vicki's Hat" in IN OUR TIME
1987 A WOMAN OF WRATH

Yi-Zheng Ki

1985 RE-UNION

Yeh Horng-Wei

1986 NEVER ENDING MEMORIES

Ang Lee

1984 FINE LINE
1991 PUSHING HANDS
1991 WESTERNIZED DAUGHTERS
1993 A WEDDING BANQUET
1995 EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN
1996 SENSE AND SENSIBILITY
1997 THE ICE STORM

Tseng Chuang-hsiang

1984 WOMAN OF WRATH

The Stories of Red Ribbons Red ribbons in Asia

by Hsing-chi Hu

from *Jump Cut*, no. 42, December 1998, pp. 116-120
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In this article, I would like to introduce the Taiwanese AIDS video series, THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS (1995), which consists of five videos made by five different directors.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] The production group is a Taiwanese media workshop (S.H.E. Workshop) organized by Nancy Wang (Wang Niantsi). These AIDS videos are the first non-official media made about these issues in Taiwan. Now at least people in Taiwan can hear alternative public voices which challenge the national Health Department's AIDS-phobic attitudes.

Produced in 1995, THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS premiered in December 1995 on Chinese Television Network in Taiwan to commemorate International AIDS Day. The programs were aired late at night on Sundays (22:05-23:00) and during the day on Mondays. Not surprisingly, AIDS issues are usually marginalized and do not easily make the daily news. This video series was broadcast in 1996 on the Taiwanese Television Network. Only one of the five videos, MY NEW FRIENDS directed by Tsai Ming-liang, has ever been exhibited outside Taiwan, and this director was invited to attend the tape's screening at the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, held at Lincoln Center.

THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS focus on conventionally constructed and "identified," infected subjects: heterosexual women (wives and sex workers), heterosexual men (businessmen), hemophiliacs (students), and gay males. The videos do have an educational purpose, but they present mainly the inner world of people with HIV/AIDS. The tapes present the memories, emotions, opinions, and everyday lives of people with AIDS and do not attempt to instruct viewers about the disease itself. Rather, the tapes seek to refract the complicated social realities/suppression, ideologies, twisted popular perceptions about AIDS and people with AIDS.

AIDS DIALOGUES:
TAIWANESE LOCAL VS. ASIAN REGIONAL

When I was told that I had a chance to translate and edit one of my Chinese articles about THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS into English,[2] I wondered how best to inscribe issues around AIDS into a special section on "Chinese/ Chinese Diaspora"

films. In fact, the AIDS stories that these five videos cover are not limited to Taiwan but also include stories from Hong Kong, Japan, and Thailand. Thus, these Taiwanese AIDS videos are neither purely "Taiwanese" nor contained in the signifier "Chinese." Instead, they indicate an "international" space invented to correspond to the transnational movement of AIDS as a disease. In this series, the AIDS narratives encapsulate the East/Southeast Asian region. Even if the tapes are included in lists of "Chinese" films, it is important to consider how this Taiwanese video production mediates AIDS themes and shows the range of AIDS issues within different Asian communities. The five tapes demonstrate the concerns of a localized Taiwanese AIDS activism to stretch out to encompass the contexts of its Asian neighbors. An AIDS dialogue among Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and Thailand encourages rethinking some similar issues: distorted and stigmatized judgments about AIDS, which lead to surveillance and oppression. These come from various aspects of national policies and health institutions; social and cultural discourses and knowledge; and heterosexualized, patriarchal family structures shared by these Asian communities.

Using THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS as an example, we can see how socially imposed moral values mentally torture and punish most Asian people with HIV/AIDS. They are not even accepted by their families, much less society. In such a context, the term "AIDS" usually connotes deadly diseases coming from "high risk" groups-homosexuals, prostitutes, heterosexual men having sex with women outside marriage, and drug abusers. In fact, within these groups, people usually lack any non-judgmental AIDS medical knowledge. Asian governments persist in their ignorance and do not treat AIDS as a crucial sphere that deserves the investment and effort to provide sound AIDS education. Nor do governmental health departments build grassroots medical activities and organizations to deal with AIDS.

Interestingly, the representations of HIV/AIDS patients in this video series are largely alike. The shots disguise or mask the people with HIV/AIDS to protect them from public exposure where they might well be regarded as the forbidden, the taboo. It is difficult to answer if this shooting style is a Taiwanese, Hong Kong, or Chinese way of visualizing the HIV/AIDS infected body. However, such a cinematic tactic seems to provide a visual technique of dehumanization that reinforces the silent agreement about AIDS among several Asian societies. In addition, we need carefully to evaluate the specific kinds of video aesthetics that can embody "AIDS," a topic which will be explored later in this article.

Looking at the five Taiwanese AIDS videos, the locations of AIDS in various geographical territories and in infected bodies complicate how AIDS is prejudicially dealt with in Asia. For example, different meanings arise by placing AIDS in the "westernized" Japan, the "self-orientalized"/ "orientalized" Thailand. In addition, in various tapes, a shy, young, male, Japanese student receives infected, "de-sexualized" blood, compared to the infected blood of a sexually active, "heterosexualized" Thai female prostitute. Japan is portrayed as a clean and advanced country while Thailand only appears as exotic. Thailand is depicted as having exquisite smells, customs, living styles, and implicated promiscuous sexualities overflowing in its booming sex industry. In addition, the Japanese young man with HIV/AIDS is depicted as a naïve victim and thus is presented more openly, with his full figure clearly seen, while the face of Thai female sex

workers are veiled in the dark.

First, I will argue, such stratification in AIDS represents a projection of Taiwan's contrasting attitudes toward Japan and Thailand. The tapes are revealing in the way they show a lack of balance among inter-Asia "imaginaries." Regrettably, people with HIV/AIDS will be blamed more if it is transmitted by "dirty" and "abnormal" sex and drugs, rather than by mistakes, such as occur with "innocent" blood transfusions. In these tapes, the body with HIV/AIDS remains stereotyped and burdened with severe cultural and social classification. This article will explore further how AIDS is condensed into and penetrates as a meaning system into diverse hierarchical sites of international formations, knowledge systems, popular discourses, and bodily regions. Following below is a textual analysis of each of the tapes of THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS with extended critical arguments.

FROM THAT DAY

THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS (Part 1). Dir. Sylvia Chang (Cheung Ai-chai). Location: Taiwan. Language: Mandarin with Chinese subtitles. 52 min., Betacam.

FROM THAT DAY is a re-enactment based on the true story of a Taiwanese woman, Mrs. Lin. Lin is in her thirties and lives in the countryside in the middle of Taiwan. She is a housewife and works part time making handicrafts. She realizes that she is infected not only by a sexual disease but also by HIV. She immediately suspects her husband, who often has sexual contact with other women. Her husband goes for HIV testing, tests positive, and later passes away. Although Lin is infected by her husband, the elders of her husband's family still treat her badly. With their paranoid beliefs, they treat her as if she has not fulfilled her duty to be a "faithful" wife. Her phobic mother-in-law pushes away the dishes Lin has used when they have a meal together. The older woman uses as an excuse that HIV can be transmitted through food. However, as we know, HIV can only be transmitted by bodily fluids or more specifically blood and semen (Patton, 1990: 45).

After being abandoned and rejected by her husband's family, financially Lin can only just sustain herself and her young daughter. Their affection and mutual support provide the most touching moments in FROM THAT DAY. Lin takes her daughter to school by motorcycle; they sing together in the Karaoke center. They share their joys and sorrows to get through the hardships of life.

FROM THAT DAY is composed of fragmentary sections — half, Lin's narrative; half, AIDS social and medical workers speaking in an educational tone and various passersby giving their opinions on AIDS. This video focuses especially on a woman's marginalized position as infected with HIV from her sexually promiscuous husband. Wearing condoms may signify "masculine impotence" to husbands. When the man needs to do so, that medical necessity confronts the presupposed, "legitimate," sexual intimacy and fidelity between husband and wife, a sexual bond socially imposed on the family. In Taiwan, it is difficult to practice safe sex within the normative frame of marriage, especially because notions about AIDS prevention in the private space of the heterosexual family have not yet been promoted as public knowledge. A member of the Taiwanese feminist activist organization, Awakening, Ni Chai-jen points out in this video that the fact that Taiwanese women with HIV/AIDS are infected through privileged marital sexual activities only proves public health policy false. The Taiwanese Health Department

has promulgated a ridiculous slogan: "There is love at home. There is no AIDS." Wives do devote their love to their husbands, but sometimes the cost is AIDS.

I am not suggesting that we morally denounce those Taiwanese husbands who are sexually active outside marriage. Instead, the issues regarding the risks of bringing AIDS home should be seriously examined. Lin's part time job does not enable her to be financially independent. She has to take care of her daughter and pay medical fees, which make her divorce difficult for her. The double pressure and torment, in addition to the physical and psychological abuse Lin has endured, indicate the dilemma of being a wife/mother with AIDS in Taiwan.

In *FROM THAT DAY*, the official Taiwanese short film "educating" people about HIV/AIDS plays on TV when Lin and her husband's family are watching TV together. By categorizing and normalizing the paths of HIV transmission, in this short film the Taiwanese government equates AIDS with evil by stressing authoritative threats and warnings. The film first introduces heterosexual AIDS and underscores those heterosexual men who indulge in drinking and consorting with women in sex-business nightclubs.

Second, the government film shows homosexual AIDS. The sequence is set in a locale like Taipei's New Park (famous for gay men's activities). Heavy drums are used in the music here, which creates a threatening atmosphere. The sequence begins at night when two men are sitting together and putting their arms around each other's shoulders. This segment implies that homosexuality and AIDS are the same terrifying things happening in the "dark"; so gay men should watch their own behavior, otherwise AIDS will soon follow.

The third type of HIV/AIDS transmission represented in the government film is through injections of medicine, drugs, and blood. But the film only emphasizes the trembling drug abusers — because of their "bad" conduct. The last type represented is direct transmission from mother to fetus. The sequence exclusively concentrates on a pregnant woman sitting on a chair, as if she alone has the responsibility for preventing AIDS infection. Apparently, official attitudes toward AIDS in Taiwan only reinforce fears about AIDS in the public mind.

According to the official interpretations, HIV/AIDS issues are only relevant to certain minorities such as gay men, licentious heterosexual men, prostitutes, hemophiliacs, injecting-drug users, and pregnant women. Moreover, most of the passersby interviewed think that AIDS transmissions are caused by "deviant" sex acts, presumably homosexual or non-marital, promiscuous sexuality, or injecting drugs. One person even said that because he lives a "normal" life, HIV/ AIDS does not have anything to do with him.

Taiwanese AIDS policy echoes the public's attitudes. Public policy treats AIDS as an eccentric epidemic for some aberrant and dangerous groups. AIDS is dangerously close to you only if you behave "abnormally." This AIDS-phobia shared by government and public accounts for why AIDS is still generally misunderstood. Such a widely shared public phobia results in segregating off a sympathetic understanding of AIDS and people with AIDS from other people's everyday lives in Taiwan.

THE TRICOLOR SKIES

THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS (Part 2). Director: Yim Ho. Location: Hong Kong. Language: Cantonese with Chinese subtitles. 52 min., Betacam.

THE TRICOLOR SKIES has three sections with three AIDS stories. A female interviewer doing the interviews connects the three independent pieces. The first interviewee is a hemophiliac who is HIV infected via blood transfusion. He is young and optimistic about his future. He cheerfully speaks of his philosophical struggles, physical pain, and expectations after being infected with HIV/AIDS.

The second interviewee is Mr. Chan, a businessman in his forties. He thinks that he was infected by his ex-wife, who died of AIDS several years ago. He suspected that his ex-wife had AIDS because she had a South African boyfriend when she was a university student. His assumption seems based on the unproven, western scientific constructions that AIDS originates from Africa. When his younger brother found out that Chan had HIV, the brother cruelly cursed him to die since AIDS seemed an insult to the family. In this way, the social stigma of AIDS is powerful enough to destroy the trust and love formerly shared within a family, a family which still cannot accept AIDS as a "normal" disease like the thousands of other diseases in the world.

The third interviewee is Judy, who got HIV from her husband. She is religious and has confidence she can fight the virus. She wishes everybody with HIV/AIDS could live their lives happily with encouragement and hope.

The stories in THE TRICOLOR SKIES and the people who tell them are real. However, as mentioned earlier, in order to protect their identity, they are exclusively represented by the back of the head and the lower part of the body. Such visual tactics — so we "cannot see their faces" — and the depressing interview questions on the soundtrack make viewers feel uncomfortable and bored. For example, most of the time the female interviewer is shown because we are not to see the interviewees' faces. Fortunately, on a visual level, outdoor scenes with seashores for backgrounds enrich and soften the stuffy atmosphere.

However, on the sound track, within the process of the interviews, the interviewer sometimes asks the questions too bluntly, e.g., "Are you afraid of death?" Here, Chan defensively responds, "I have never thought of death." Such social voyeurism in peeping and pushing questions of "death" hurt people with HIV/AIDS and is unkind and prejudiced. Based on the interviews with Chan and Judy, it is clear that AIDS is closely linked with national policy, the medical system, and social structure. AIDS is not simply itself a virus; rather, the nation-state/ society/ culture "pathologically" stigmatizes AIDS. Chan says that he used to do business in both Hong Kong and China. However, the government of China now keeps people with HIV/AIDS from entering China. Chan notes,

"Hopefully, the government of China will revise its AIDS policy after 1997. Otherwise, we will be pushed into ocean because there will be nowhere to go."

Although China, the mother country, always claims she is warm and affectionate to the people of Hong Kong, China exiles marginalized Hong Kong people with HIV/AIDS.

Judy also mentions that in Hong Kong itself, AIDS is discriminated against and

regarded as a disease of death, sexual promiscuity, and homosexuality. In addition, HIV testing is still not well organized enough to be a regular component in Hong Kong medical and health institutions. The failure to incorporate HIV testing in general physicals and in Hong Kong hospitals also causes a delay in informing people to whom the disease has possibly been transmitted. This situation within the Hong Kong medical establishment indicates how much AIDS is isolated and excluded by health and medical care regimes as being "specific" and "mysterious," much as the public generally imagines it.

FIGHTING 19

THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS (Part 3). Director: Huang Chun-ming. Location: Japan. Language: Mandarin/ Japanese with Chinese subtitles. 52 min. Betacam.

FIGHTING 19 is a story of a 19 year-old Japanese young man, Ryuhei Kawada. Kawada was born a hemophiliac. When he was ten, he was told that he was infected with HIV from blood transfusions. In Japan, up to 70% of hemophiliacs have HIV. In the past, the Japanese Health Department did not quickly take action to forbid the use of unheated blood products, so more and more unaware Japanese hemophiliacs continued having non-heated blood transfusions and consequently were infected by HIV.

As one of the victims, Kawada bravely came out to claim his identity of being a blood transfusion HIV carrier. He details errors made by the Japanese Health Department and medical corporations of their errors, and he further requested legal sanction and reparation. Encouraged by Kawada, many Japanese young men stepped out and joined Kawada's protest group. Finally their efforts attracted the public's attentions. The government and the courts are under pressure to enact justice. In 1995, both the Health Department and medical corporations were found guilty and required to pay indemnity.

Having had discussions with my friends, we all agreed that we felt more comfortable when watching FIGHTING 19 than the rest of videos of THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS. Unlike the other gloomy videos, the narrative's tune and rhythm in FIGHTING 19 are brighter and livelier with explosive energies. The AIDS protest is cheerful and promising. Out on the streets, the university students shout angrily and gesture with vigorous bodily movements. Most important, Kawada is there with his figure visible, fighting and striking back to win social justice. We should rethink why and how Kawada can reveal his face.

Kawada luckily wins strong support from the media, even NHK, one of the major Japanese TV networks, which also reports on Kawada's political project around AIDS. Kawada is more acceptable to Japanese society because he is regarded as the blameless victim, passively infected by the blood transfusion, as opposed to those people with HIV/ AIDS who are responsible for their own sexual contacts or drug injections. Apparently, moral baggage heavily rides on the body with AIDS. Whether the face must be hidden or not is decided by the social norms defining to what extent if this AIDS case is guilty or deserves redemption.

THE HEART OF BUDDHA

THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS (Part 4). Director: Yu Kan-ping. Location:

Thailand. Language: Mandarin/Thai with Chinese subtitles. 53 min., Betacam.

At the beginning, I was quite surprised when I watched THE HEART OF BUDDHA. The early part of this video (about 10-20 minutes) looks like a sightseeing or travel TV documentary program such as those available on satellite TV on the Discovery channel. Led by the voice over of an invisible male tour guide who speaks very standard Mandarin, we are introduced to Thailand's opulent landscapes with sights such as monks, temples, martial exercises, and people living on riverboats. After this opening, there is a simple historical review of developments in Thailand since the 70s. According to this video, Thailand is shaped by several forces, such as the U.S. military presence, industrialization, modernization, and tourism, especially sex tourism. Gradually, the narrative moves to the main character's story.

We hear from a 21 year-old young woman who married at the age of 13-14 and lived in the countryside. Several years later, her husband ran away with their child. She was left alone without any financial support. Thus, she became a prostitute in Bangkok and was infected with HIV/AIDS. As usual, her face is not clearly revealed. This time the cinematic techniques used for hiding the face are somewhat different from the ones used in THE TRICOLOR SKIES. Sitting on the chair and telling her own story under a big tree, she sits obscurely in the dark. Her face is heavily shadowed so that only her silhouetted profile can be seen.

It is claimed that 1% of the population in Thailand — that is, 700,000 out of 70,000,000 Thai people — are HIV infected. The general impression in Thailand about the large number of people with HIV/AIDS is that the prosperous sex industry and related tourism contributes to the input and output of transnational AIDS infection. Based on what Thai officials say, the country still seems obsessed with the idea of relating AIDS to prostitutes and homosexuals. Lots of warnings and cautionary posters about AIDS and AIDS prevention appear in public toilets and shower rooms in the popular sightseeing places.

In THE HEART OF BUDDHA, one Thai official says that the Thai government hopes that foreign tourists do not just come to their country to sleep with their women. Instead, foreign visitors should learn to appreciate the friendly Thai people and their customs. It seems that by blaming the foreigners as the migratory vectors who introduce AIDS into the bodies of the Thai prostitutes, Thailand might purify its own national image. However, such nationalist speech also signifies "self-orientalizing," "self-sexualizing," and "self-effacing" Thailand, as if the nation were defenselessly open to economical and sexual colonization from abroad without any resistance.

Thai women, especially female sex workers, are viewed as a potential high risks group likely to convey HIV from foreign heterosexual male customers to their husbands or to other Thai heterosexual men and their wives. The official public policy statement emphasizes that AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease, particularly referring to Thai prostitutes. In this way, the statement reveals its sexism and homophobia. Here, complicated AIDS stratifications cut across the borders of nations, gender and sexualities. The xenophobic complex will not help Thailand solve AIDS problems. What the Thai government should do is construct and carry out a rational, non-discriminating AIDS policy, which aims to prevent AIDS, help people with HIV/AIDS get settled in a good medical environment, and

offer them alternative possibilities for work.

In *THE HEART OF BUDDHA*, the juxtaposition of the first part, a tourist guide to Thailand, against the second part, focused on AIDS, reveals inconsistencies and ruptures. These ruptures are caused by impetuously exoticizing both the Thai national body and the HIV virus. The split between the two halves of the video may also reflect on how Taiwanese video production could "orientalize" Thailand. Taiwan, even though geographically situated in a so-called "third world" Eastern location is also influenced by global, "oriental" impulses; it often imitates first world imperial gestures. Thus many Taiwanese's perceptions of Thailand parallel those of Western foreigners who go to Thailand for sexual pleasure. As critic John Erni indicates about Thailand, "Tourists from Japan, Hong Kong came to occupy their city and country" (1997: 73). I would add, "And from Thailand."

In the eyes of Taiwan or other Asian countries with economic advantages, Thailand can be seen exotic and sexually desirable. "Orientalism" does not have to take place in the tensions between the West and the East; it can also exist among Asian countries. As long as Thailand is conceptualized either by the first world Western or the third world Eastern countries as the "pathological," "promiscuous," and "sexually dangerous" other, it can immediately elicit the logic of Orientalism and imperialism. *THE HEART OF BUDDHA* can well be regarded as an "oriental" representation of the national and sexual cultures of post-colonial Thailand.

MY NEW FRIENDS

THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS (Part 5). Director: Tsai Ming-liang. Location: Taiwan. Language: Mandarin with Chinese subtitles. 57 min., Betacam.

MY NEW FRIENDS is composed of two sections of interviews. The interviewer is Tsai Ming-liang, the director himself, with two gay men infected with HIV (one thin, the other muscular). In the first section, a cozy dialogue between Tsai Ming-liang and the thin man is held peacefully in a dark room with dim light. Conversation topics vary from "When did you begin to like men?" to "What conditions do you think led to your infection?" or even "What do you think about homosexuality?" (Shouldn't another question be added: "What do you think about straightness?") Both voyeuristic and compassionate, Tsai Ming-liang's interview seems caught between contradictory desires for distance and intimacy.

The thin man is shown through close-ups of segments of his body, but not his face. Thus we see his thin arms with protruding veins, his skinny fingers holding a cigarette and smoking away. In order to substitute for the absence of the thin man's face, Tsai Ming-liang's face must constantly appear. No wonder Tsai Ming-liang won a prize for "the best actor" in *MY NEW FRIENDS*. However, sometimes Tsai Ming-liang also seems too shy to reveal himself; either we see his head sinking into the dark, or, just like the thin man, only the lower part of his body is exposed. This visual style creates an unusual viewing experience for me. Two "faceless" male bodies (sometimes a head is out of frame, sometimes the camera faces the back of a head) are talking. In an extreme way, the mirrors in the room are used to reflect the two of them. At the beginning Tsai Ming-liang's face is shown in the mirrors, but gradually his face disappears. It is as if two mirrored phantoms without corporeal bodies or heads only wish to vanish. At that moment as a viewer, I want to close my eyes.

In the second section of MY NEW FRIENDS, the men's soft conversation and the aesthetics of representation are similar to that of the previous section. The muscular man tells of his everyday experiences and his love life before and after becoming an HIV carrier. Again, as a viewer I do not feel like watching, but prefer listening with closed eyes and slipping into their intimate communications. Halfway through their conversation, Tsai Ming-liang suddenly asks, "Could I put my leg over there?" He stretches out his leg on the mattress where the muscular man is sitting. It seems that the barriers between these two men have gradually melted away, and AIDS no longer signifies a fatal threat that stops people's attempts to reach mutual understanding.

At the end of this video, the indoor scene switches to an outdoor scene. The camera functions like an eye shining with tenderness, gazing at the muscular man's back as he is riding his motorcycle home. Simultaneously, the commentary in the background comes from the lyrics of the touching, soft love song that the muscular man sings with the guitar. The love and passion which the muscular man has experienced psychologically allow him to resist the effects of HIV.

EVERYBODY'S AIDS

"The AIDS narrative exists as a technology of social repression; it is a representation that attempts to silence not only the claims of identity politics, but the people marginalized by AIDS" (Patton, 1990: 131).

What Patton demonstrates to be a "technology of social repression" indicates how the video aesthetics of THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS operate. Unlike "normal" people who can reveal their faces without having to hide, the faces of people with HIV/AIDS are presumably not supposed to be exhibited in the public realm. Treated cruelly as disfigured "monsters," they are feared and dehumanized as "disgusting" by society. "To film without the face" for the sake of protecting people with HIV/AIDS from public display only confirms the mechanism whereby social anxieties around AIDS are displaced and condensed into real bodies with the virus.

This reminds me of what happened to one of the leaders among the Taiwanese group performers, Tian Chi-yen, who died of AIDS in 1996. His dead body was isolated and untouchable, not allowed to be washed, clothed, made up, and not accepted by any of the funeral homes. Such an overwhelming repulsion, discrimination, and annihilation of the body is a most terrifying and inhumane act to inflict on a person with AIDS. The "national AIDS panics" that surround the dead body with AIDS uncover how the state and public in Taiwan coldly turn their backs on a "silenced" body who no longer can speak for his own rights and for justice. Sadly, the collective identities of people with AIDS are not defined by their own. Instead, these collective identities are only invented in socially hostile ways, especially in representing deformed, phantom-like, and entirely rejected bodies. In Taiwan, people with AIDS are still closeted, mystified and marginalized in the dark; generally they have not been strong enough to generate identity politics at this stage.

The productions of THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS encourage a friendly start. The Taiwanese media has begun to have a concern for AIDS issues, not only locally but also involving Asian regional interests. However, whether in Taiwan or in other

parts of Asia, AIDS social movements, battles for in-depth reorganizing of non-discriminatory AIDS health policies, or contestations of media representations of AIDS still have a long way to go. As the female protagonist in *THE HEART OF BUDDHA*, who slightly reveals her face in a slow-motion shot at the end, states,

"AIDS is not only the business of people with AIDS, but rather it is the business of the nation, the society, and everybody."

AIDS still needs everybody's struggles.

NOTES

Especial thanks to Adrian and Siu for their enthusiasm and help revising my English version of this article.

1. The five directors are Sylvia Chang, Yim Ho, Huang Chun-ming, Yu Kan-ping, and Tsai Ming-liang. Currently settled in Hong Kong, Sylvia Chang has had a prolific thirty-year career as a Taiwanese actress/director/singer. Yim Ho, from Hong Kong, who developed a filmmaking career in China and Hong Kong, made the feature *KITCHEN* (1997) based on a best-selling Japanese novel by Banana Yoshimoto and co-produced with Hong Kong, Japanese and Mainland Chinese actors and actresses. Huang Chun-ming, famous as a Taiwanese nativist novelist in the 70s and the 80s, has seen his works widely adapted by Taiwan New Cinema in the 80s. Yu Kan-ping pioneered in making *OUTCAST* (1986), the first explicitly gay story in the history of Taiwanese cinema. Tsai Ming-liang is a Taiwanese director who won prizes in the Venice and Berlin international film festival for *VIVA L'AMOUR* (1994) and *THE RIVER* (1997).

2. This article in English is essentially based on the Chinese article, "Exploring THE STORIES OF RED RIBBONS: the AIDS Video Series," published in the Taiwanese film journal, *Film Appreciation*, 83-84, 1996, pp. 134-141. I have gained some new perspectives in the process of rewriting.

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China: Land of My Father •

The Way to My Father's Village • Made in China

Decentering the Middle Kingdom

by Peter X Feng

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"Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" — Maxine Hong Kingston[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

"Whatever the camera reproduces is beautiful. The disappointment of the prospect that one might be the typist who wins the world trip is matched by the disappointing appearance of the accurately photographed areas which the voyage might include. Not Italy is offered, but proof that it exists." — Max Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno

AMERICAN-BORN CHINESE AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Growing up in a tract home in a Seattle suburb, surrounded by white, lower-middle-class neighbors, I felt my parents had the freedom to define China however they wanted.[2] They seemed to be making up Chinese traditions as they went along. When we visited my grandfather's gravesite (in the Chinese American section of Seattle's Volunteer Park cemetery), the ritual of bowing and lighting incense and burning fake money was always changing. When I was told to finish my dinner, I was warned that every grain of rice left in my bowl would produce a freckle on my face; as I grew older the threatened freckle was promoted to a pimple, and eventually a pockmark. Years later, I found out that girls were told that the marks would appear on their husband's faces, not theirs: that seemed more likely, but not as fair.

I never believed that Chinese traditions prescribed my parents' actions, only mine; so-called Chinese tradition was clearly a form of social control, and my parents had the power to define it. After all, Chinese was the language they spoke when they wanted to talk privately while I was still in the room. Chinese tradition was a parent's disciplinary tool powerful enough that my parents never had to resort to, "Because I said so," for I never felt that my will was strong enough to challenge the natural order of things Chinese.

Of course, the authority that accrued to things Chinese was not purely a function of my parents' power but was due in great part to the images of China in the mass media and surrounding culture. For suburban boys no less than for city boys, China was the land of martial arts. A touring exhibition called "The Orient Expressed" portrayed China as a land of meticulous craftsmen producing effete *objets d'art*. Grammar school social studies books noted that the Chinese had invented gunpowder. China was a mysterious, rich culture, whose accomplishments were all in the past. This image reinforced my parents' authority even as it did nothing to establish China's contemporary relevance.

I was not Chinese-American, caught between two cultures. Instead, Chinese culture was a part of me that I was powerless to define, like a mark on my forehead that I couldn't see. My parents could see it, and they told me what it meant; and the white boys I played with could see it, and they told me what it meant. But I couldn't see it in me, and I couldn't see it in my parents. In short, China was someone else's discursive construction. How can we as Chinese Americans go about creating our own meaningful discourses about China and (by extension) definitions of our own subjectivities?

This essay examines three movies (two films and one video) that document the journey of an American-born Chinese (ABC) to the land of her/his parent's birth. [3] At the very least these movies add a subjective dimension to ethnographic depictions of China; Felicia Lowe has stated that she consciously conceived of her film as a counter-travelogue (Lowe). However, counter-travelogues are not inherently self-critical; their subjectivity can reveal itself in an awestruck fascination with Chinese difference and a romantic desire to deny that difference. Each of these three documentaries evinces ethnographic tendencies, whether deliberately, in disguised fashion, or unknowingly. The very inspiration for these projects — the parent — is the key, for each movie is at its clearest when the maker is distinguishing between China and the Chinese parent, and at its muddiest when China and parent arc collapsed. These movies face the very problem of cultural context to which Maxine Hong Kingston alludes.

Kingston's dilemma — that of separating what is Chinese from what is peculiarly familial — arises from not knowing where a text (like a parent) ends and a context (like China) begins. The journey to China might be thought of as an attempt to construct a filter through which one can regard one's parents and childhood. The things that are filtered out are Chinese, the things that can still be seen must be familial.[4] Growing up in Seattle suburbs, I knew that my friends' definition of China was a useless filter (since my parents didn't know kung fu); in other words, I knew that the prevailing "Chinese" filter was itself a discourse. Was it possible to build a filter free of those misleading discourses?

How are we to use China to evaluate our parents if our parents have already created our impressions of China? How can we see China without also seeing the stories that have been told about China? To journey to China in an attempt to contextualize and possibly discredit the stories we have heard is to put our own identity at risk. It is hardly surprising then that we find it easier to see a China which has already been narrativized than a China which contradicts those narratives.

These travel movies made by immigrants' children do not simply document the child's journey *to* China but evaluate the parent's migration *from* China. China implicitly indicates the culture left behind. Therefore, these films posit that Chinese American identity is not hyphenate, made up of equal parts China and America, but hierarchical, with Chinese identity suppressed by American subjectivity. The narrative of "return" to China is thus one of recovery, implying that a Chinese cultural identity has been buried or left behind. But to posit the Asian American experience as one in which "original" cultures are exchanged for "American" culture would mean to posit ethnicity as innate and *a priori* rather than fluid and constructed out of the intersection of permeable (as opposed to discrete) cultures. To draw a strict boundary between cultures helps preserve a stable notion of American-ness and insures that immigrants will never be fully assimilated. Rather, the possibility of assimilation is the carrot dangled before their children, but the imaginary boundary further insures that they will not be active shapers of an American identity but rather the beneficiaries of a prefabricated identity.

The pervasiveness of these assumptions is revealed by the plethora of Asian American literary and cinematic narratives about generational conflict, a theme so common that Lisa Lowe refers to it as a trope.[5] In "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," Lowe critiques this trope of generational conflict in Asian American literary texts, arguing that

"interpreting Asian American culture exclusively in terms of the master narratives of generational conflict and filial relation essentializes Asian American culture, obscuring the particularities and incommensurabilities of class, gender, and national diversities among Asians" (26).

Lowe calls for sensitivity to diversity among Asian Americans. She notes that diversity is sufficient to preclude the possibility of a singular Asian culture inherited by Asian Americans and therefore precludes the possibility of an *a priori* Asian American culture. Instead, Lowe says we should

"define ethnicity in a manner that accounts not only for cultural inheritance, but for active cultural construction, as well" (27).

This does not mean that "active," resistant cultural strategies necessarily evade the master narratives of generational conflict to be found in narratives of assimilation. In Lowe's view, the Asian American cultural-nationalist position conforms to the binary logic that insists that Asia and America are discrete entities. Thus when "Asian American feminists who challenge Asian American sexism are cast as 'assimilationist,' as betraying Asian American 'nationalism,'" "assimilation" and "nationalism" are deployed as a "false opposition" (31). Both positions rely on essentialism, upon the reduction of generational conflict to cultural difference, upon a binary logic that attributes old cultural values to the older generation, and new values to the younger. Furthermore, that essentialist position begs the question: Are cultures that distinct to begin with?

Lowe cites the feature film *A GREAT WALL* (Peter Wang, 1985), avowedly a narrative about culture clash between Chinese and Chinese Americans, and she argues that the film depicts a China which has already absorbed Coca-Cola and the

Gettysburg Address. The Great Wall itself becomes "a monument to the historical condition that not even ancient China was 'pure,'" representing China's perceived need — and its failure — to police its borders (37-38). By failing to allow for the permeability of cultural spaces, the trope of generational conflict fails to account for the complexities of cultural mixing and hybrid identities. Thus it begs the question: If one's parents were essentially Chinese, then why travel to China at all since Chinese culture is available in one's parents' home?

The essentialist trope of generational conflict only works if migration flows in just one direction, from China to the U.S., from Chinese culture to American culture. By journeying to China, filmmakers collect on their parents' return tickets, giving the lie to one-way cultural flow. Thomas Wolfe's dictum, "You can't go home again," is thus not a lament but rather our saving grace. It provides for a multiplicity of Chinas and a multiplicity of Chinese and Chinese American identities.[6] While journeys to China may be inspired by romantic visions of reunification with one's inner self, that destination can never be reached because that China no longer exists. That is why these filmmakers do not simply tell their own stories about going to China and back but must incorporate their parents' narratives. The China of the past cannot be accessed through a geographical journey but only through a temporal one. It is only by examining a parent's narrative of migration that one can account for temporal changes so as to realign the China one sees with the China that one's parents saw.

The disparity between China as seen and China as previously narrativized can be recouped within narrative logic — as transformation. Narrativizing the journey to China incorporates many Chinas, rejecting, as Lisa Lowe does, the notion that China exists as a discrete space. Thus the visit to China does not serve as an attempt to see what is there now but to find traces of what was there before. The visit attempts to substitute spatial for temporal migration.

Therefore, these movies are forensic. They examine what has been left behind in an attempt to reconstruct what has happened. They search the tangible present to access the intangible past. In so doing, the filmmakers reveal that they are not seeking China but rather its transformation. Thus, they are not simply interested in what in them is Chinese but in what in them is *not* Chinese.

They are not just interested in their parent's identity with China but in what compelled their parents to disidentify with China. In other words, by reconstructing the narrative of a parent's departure from China, the child hopes to understand how the parent's needs were not met by China. As the child does this, the journey itself comes into its own, completely eclipsing the destination.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The two films and one video that I examine in this essay each seek connection with the China of their ancestors and/or of their living relatives. The movies range from a 1979 PBS documentary to a 1987 video documentary that draws on experimental video traditions. Explicitly or implicitly, each of these movies is a travelogue, and it is no accident that they each emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Before then, travel to and from China was restricted by international politics, most notably the Communist Revolution, which not only spurred migration from China, but made re-entry difficult. In the mid-1960s, when immigration reform opened the

door for the migration of Chinese relatives of Chinese Americans, travel to China was still difficult. It was only with the end of the Cultural Revolution that China became accessible again. (Note that it is specifically *mainland China* that has inspired cinematic investigation, not Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc.)[7] Films about personal journeys to China were thus not possible before the late 70s, and concern to know the fate of relatives in China became an important motivation for such journeys.[8] Similarities of timing aside, the particular family histories that motivated each of these movies, as well as the details of production, vary widely.

Felicia Lowe's *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER* (1979) was produced on 16mm for KQED in San Francisco. Lowe had worked at KQED for several years, and when the opportunity arose for her to join a group of mostly print journalists traveling to China, she immediately asked KQED for funds. (Around this time, Lowe won an Emmy for a series on financial planning for women and received a nomination for a series on breast cancer.) KQED turned her down, so she sought funding from all the stations in the San Francisco Bay area with no luck. By chance, Lowe discovered that a friend of hers knew PBS' Barry Chase ("probably the only time the old boys' network worked for me"); Chase was familiar with her work for the series "Turnabout." Meanwhile, Lowe made plans with a reporter for *Good Morning America*. The two of them agreed to travel together, split the cost to hire a camera operator, and engineer sound for each other's projects. Three days before Lowe boarded the plane, CPB and KQED came through with funding and a December 25 airdate, leaving Lowe with only eight weeks turnaround time. The next year, the program aired nationally on PBS (Lowe).

Lowe's film is a very conventionally shot and edited documentary that relies heavily on voice-over narration. No doubt this is due in part to Lowe's time and budgetary constraints (the project had an extremely low shooting ratio), but it can also be attributed to PBS' preference for traditional documentary structures. Despite Lowe's stated intention to counter traditional travelogue documentaries, *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER* replicates many of the traditional features of such documentaries, e.g., reciting statistics about contemporary China and making obligatory visits to established sites like the Great Wall. The film's subjective dimension emerges in Lowe's perspective as an immigrant's daughter and in the rendezvous with her father's family that closes the film.

CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER begins with scenic views of the Chinese countryside at sunset and narrates the story of Lowe Wing-Sun, the filmmaker's father. The images of China give way to footage of Lowe's family going through picture albums, as Lowe's narration shifts into first-person and expresses her desire that her own son know more about his heritage. Lowe accompanies a group of journalists touring China, and she intersperses information about China with commentary on her emotional journey (her attempts to communicate using her father's rare dialect, etc.). While visiting a Chinese news agency, Lowe meets a woman whom she describes as her "soulmate" — Sung Meiyu, a mother and a student at Beijing's Institute of Journalism, who asks Lowe, "How do American women balance their careers and their families?" Lowe visits this woman's home, where the two women talk about mothers' roles in the workforce. As with the rest of the film up to this point, this visit is shot and edited as a traditional documentary (with establishing shots and "talking heads"). It is only Lowe's voice over relaying her own impressions that hints at a subjective approach.

Eventually, Lowe departs from the tour group and journeys to meet her father's surviving family, consisting of Lowe's grandmother as well as several aunts and uncles. As with the earlier visit with Sung Meiyu, this segment is visually conventional, but Lowe's narration adds a subjective dimension to the "objective" account of family life in this small village. At film's end, Lowe tearfully says goodbye to her grandmother, and the film closes as it began, with images of the same Chinese countryside.

In contrast, Richard Fung's *THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE* (1988), produced on video, begins with a seemingly unmotivated image of a brick path, a stylized enactment of a bureaucratic interview, and an almost parodically authoritative, British-accented narrator who relates the story of the birth and North American migration of Fung's father. Fung, a Toronto-based videomaker and activist, is perhaps best known for his videos about Asian Canadian Queer issues.[9] Funded in part by the Ontario Arts Council, *THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE* documents a filmmaker's visit to China, but unlike Lowe's film, Fung's video reaches beyond the temporal boundaries of the journey itself, documenting Fung's research into his father's story and the process by which Fung assembled the video. This process is revealed not only in Fung's commentary on video production but also in the clear disjuncture between images and narrated events.

For example, the video's opening sequence depicts the story of Eugene Fung's arrival in Vancouver, journey across North America to Halifax, boat journey to Trinidad, and eventual retirement to Toronto. That narration on the sound track is accompanied by contemporary video footage of a ferry crossing a body of water, the view out the window of a jumbo jet, etc. In fact, it is common documentary practice to utilize stock footage or contemporary footage with somewhat tangential connections to the voice-over narration. However, the striking disparity between the sound and image track in *THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE* hints that this video will not provide the coherent diegesis or story space of Lowe's *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER*.

Following the summary of the facts of Eugene Fung's life, the video shifts gears and presents a non-linear, impressionistic portrait of Eugene's family life. Richard Fung's voice over, its lilting Trinidadian tones in stark contrast to the British-accented narrator, describes his emotionally distant relationship with his father. Fung expresses curiosity about gaps in what he knows about his father, those events in his past of which his father would not speak. Here, the image track presents home movies of Trinidad, interspersed with character-generated intertitles that echo phrases spoken by the voice over.

A taped conversation with Eugene's niece and nephew follows. It, too, departs from linear documentary construction. Rather than presenting "talking heads" speaking to an off-camera interviewer, the interviewer/videomaker sits at a dining room table alongside his cousins while the video camera circles them. While there are indications that the interview has been edited for the video, the long-takes and rambling sound track suggest that Fung has taken pains not to streamline the footage and impose a linear narrative. Unlike a talking-heads sequence, then, which either rehearses testimony or edits out tangential comments, this sequence has the intimate tone of a conversation over tea, without however constructing a

coherent diegesis.

Like Felicia Lowe, Fung seems to have journeyed to China as part of a package tour, accompanied by his mother; they parted that tour's company to journey to his father's village. Unlike in Lowe's film, in the China sequences here, Fung never appears before the camera, and his voice overs discuss the omissions, mistakes, and frustrations of his project. In another sequence, the visit to Eugene's village is offset by images from the rest of the tour, each section framed further by a series of narratives about China from previous visitors ranging from Marco Polo to Roland Barthes. Fung's video does not close with images of the Chinese countryside but rather returns to Toronto, and Fung makes it clear that he experienced no mystical reconciliation with the land of his father.

Lisa Hsia's *MADE IN CHINA* (1986) differs from the two previously-discussed movies in that it depicts a long-term visit: Hsia stayed with her cousin's family for five years while attending the University of Beijing. (The film was supported by grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, New York State Council on the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and two other foundations.) As such, Hsia's film is not primarily about retracing her parents' experiences in China. However, Hsia does avowedly frame the journey as one in which she tests American preconceptions about China, so that she constantly compares the narrative of her childhood in Chicago with the narratives of her relatives in China.

As a portrait of family life in contemporary China, Hsia's film follows a thematic structure rather than a chronological or linear one. Hsia's position within the film is neither that of an outsider trapped behind the camera (as Richard Fung portrays himself) nor that of a native tour guide. Footage of Hsia's Chinese family at times echoes the journalistic approach used to depict Felicia Lowe's visiting her Chinese "soulmate," but as we also see Hsia participating in that family's life, the film sheds some of its "ethnographic tone." Hsia states in voice over,

"[T]he key to learning about China was not to go the 'protected foreigner' route, [however] it wasn't wise tramping around pretending to be a local, either."

The solution she hits upon is to let her family serve as her guide. By insinuating herself into her Chinese family, Hsia can experience China as a "local" but only because her family buffers the "foreigner."

This complex inside/outside (local/foreigner) authorial position is evident in the interaction of various cinematic registers (types of footage) in the film's China sequences. (In addition, the film combines animation sequences, silent home movies, and still photos to depict Hsia's U.S. childhood). The China experience proper is represented through three distinct cinematic registers (8mm sync-sound home movie footage shot by Hsia, 16mm footage shot by two camera operators, and animation sequences designed by Michael Sporn). Hsia's 8mm footage documents the family's domestic space, and her family responds as an American family would to home movies. They address the camera directly, that is, address Hsia behind the camera (for example, one of the boys performs his Charlie Chaplin impersonation). The animated footage depicts Hsia's solo encounters with "institutional China" (an altercation with a traffic cop, a visit to a clinic). And the 16mm footage operates in three distinct documentary modes: (a) *vérité* footage of

the family (diegetic footage in which Hsia and her family "ignore" the camera); (b) a hybrid talking-heads style, where Hsia's cousin Xue Su directly addresses either the camera or an interviewer (Hsia) off-screen; and (c) journalistic/ ethnographic/ tourist shots of Beijing street scenes (tai chi exercises, a dragon kite), in most of which Hsia does not appear.[10] These five distinct types of footage articulate different positions along the insider/outsider axis: the home movies at one extreme, the ethnographic shots at the other, with the *vérité*, animation, and direct address falling in between.[11]

Hsia's voice-over perpetually draws comparison between the United States and China, whether noting contemporaneous events in the two countries, comparing the independence and privacy she has in the United States to her restricted role in her Chinese family, or speculating about growing up in China. Footage shot in the diegetic "present" in China is constantly juxtaposed against representations (snapshots and home movies) of the diegetic "past" in the United States. For example, the film begins with Hsia's departure from China, presents animation to depict Hsia's childhood ignorance of things Chinese, shows an old photo of an extended Chinese family in the 1930s, cuts to *vérité* footage of Hsia presenting gifts to her Chinese hosts, gives us a glimpse of Hsia's 8mm footage, narrates childhood in Chicago with reference to family snapshots, returns to *vérité* footage of Hsia's mother's visit to Beijing, cuts back to an American childhood by way of home movie footage, and so on...all in the first ten minutes. On first screening, the rapid juxtaposition of divergent eras, cultures, and modes of cinematic representation serves to level out the way the film incorporates various cinematic cues, but a close analysis reveals the complex process of signification alluded to in the preceding paragraph. On the surface, Hsia's film seems far less radical and self-reflexive than Fung's video, stylistically closer to Lowe's *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER*. But careful attention to the film's enunciative process reveals a sophisticated, constantly shifting theory of Chinese American identity and history. The film's title, *MADE IN CHINA*, is an ambiguous, punning reference that seems to imply an essentialist take on Asian American identity. However, does the title refer to Hsia, her family, or the film itself (the latter certainly was "made" in China, even if postproduction was in the United States)?

LOSING YOURSELF IN THE LANDSCAPE

In these movies, the journey to China always pursues something other than China, something both of the self and beyond it. The object of these cinematic texts is potentially and simultaneously China, the parent, and the child. Inspired by an autobiographical impulse, these movies are not literally autobiographies, yet in journeying to China to find the self, these movies document subjectivities that threaten to disappear into the landscape.[12] Take for example a particularly fascinating passage in *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER*, wherein Lowe narrates her first impressions of the landscape:

"These first images of the Chinese countryside are surprisingly familiar. The lush, green fields remind me of California's Sacramento Delta and the many summers I'd spent there as a child. I understand for the first time why so many Chinese settled in the Sacramento Valley: it was just like home." [13]

Later, as she nears her family's village, she notes,

"I'm sure my father crossed the same rivers and tributaries forty years earlier when he left the area."

While she is in China, Lowe's identification with her father leads her to imagine the moment when he left China rather than to look for the China that he knew. She projects her own response onto her father, imagining that he journeyed to the United States and settled somewhere that reminded him of home, thus marking his journey from China while affirming his memory of it. Rather than reveling in "homecoming," Lowe looks out her train window to see California, and in return sees California as not-China. Thus China becomes the source, California the pale imitation. But, of course, for Lowe Sacramento existed before Canton.

Lowe's vision of California as surrogate China is an intervention that views China not as an inscrutably foreign place but rather one with significant continuities with the United States. However, in order to accomplish such a rhetorical move, *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER* must also acknowledge China's differences. It must participate in a tradition of representing China as foreign in order to question that tradition. The ways that each of the three movies takes up this rhetorical and psychological problem depends greatly upon the child/narrator's identification with China. The degree to which a movie self-consciously foregrounds the way in which it participates in and contributes to the discursive construction of "China" is inversely related to its narrator's forging of emotional bonds with China.

CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER

The child that seeks to understand the parent often wants to understand how parent and child are both alike and different. The parent must be established as both the same and different, as both native and foreign. In this context, Lowe's complicated assertion that China is like and is not like California begins to make sense. Upon venturing deeper into rural Canton, Lowe's narration observes,

"I'm more taken by this scenery than any place I've seen so far. We'd stayed in many cities, but the majority of the population lives in the countryside, so it seems more like the real China to see people actually working in the fields. The faces look hauntingly familiar; they look like the Chinese people in America, but wearing different clothes. The reason is simple: I learn more than 90% of the early immigrants come from this southern province."

Lowe thus makes two paradoxical assertions: first, that the real China is rural (and, by extension, timeless in an "orientalized" sense), and second, that this "real" China is also the birthplace of Chinese America. Lowe seeks herself in the heart of China, and thus she must assert that the land she visits is both genuinely foreign and fundamentally related to her own heritage.

Lowe's discourse about the "real" China does not take place between her relatives and herself or between other Chinese and herself. We hear this discourse only between Lowe and her tour companions and between Lowe and us, her U.S. television audience (to whom Lowe speaks in voice over). In the film's only extended passage without voice over, Lowe and two fellow tourists, both apparently white women, sit on the train and discuss what they've seen so far. Lowe's friends

emphasize getting away from the tour, from the hotel rooms and other enclosed spaces, and visiting marketplaces and shops: they are most interested in spaces which reveal the way modern life is lived in China. For her part, Lowe shifts the conversation to a temple that they visited, what she describes as the first "genuine" temple that they saw. At first, Lowe's words echo her companions, in that she emphasizes getting away from the tour and its sanitized sights. But while Lowe's companions find "genuine" China in the rhythms of modern life, Lowe finds "genuine" China in a preserved temple and in a three-thousand-year-old tree that she is able to touch. As Lowe tells her companions that the tree provides evidence of "continuous growth," the image dissolves to Lowe on the Great Wall. The "genuine" China for Lowe resides in the past, not the present.

This difference between Lowe's tour companions and Lowe herself is crucial. It reminds us that Lowe's desire for an exoticized, ancient China, as constructed by her voice over, cannot simply be attributed to an orientalizing vision of China desired by the PBS audience, for that vision is not shared with Lowe's companions, presumably print journalists and thus in a sense a surrogate PBS demographic. Lowe is not so much complicitous with her audience's demand for an orientalized China as she herself is seeking an orientalized China. The footage reveals that the foreignness of the China that Lowe sees is held in productive tension with her own (perceived) ability to penetrate that foreignness. This tension is figured in Lowe's dialect, an offshoot of Cantonese. Lowe cannot speak official Putong hua, the people's language, and thus her contact with contemporary, modern China is mediated. When she encounters Cantonese speakers, she is better able to communicate (although still mediated by dialects) until she finally encounters her family, who speak her dialect, and is able to assert unmediated conversation. Lowe's own knowledge of the Chinese language marks the tension between accessibility to and exclusion from China, and the fact that she has most communication with her family because they speak her dialect parallels her assertion of an "inborn and indestructible" connection to her family.

Lowe's simultaneous desire to affirm her connection to and separation from China surfaces whenever she has contact with the Chinese people, not counting her relatives. In Canton, she sees the faces of Chinese Americans. When she converses via an interpreter with Chinese people on the street of an unnamed city, she surmises that their interest in her means they might have relatives in the United States. As Lowe interprets this public interest as people's displaced desire to identify with her, in actuality, it is Lowe who projects her own desires onto them.

The narrators of *THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE* and *MADE IN CHINA* are also guilty of projecting their own expectations onto China and the people that they encounter. But Fung's video and Hsia's film differ from Lowe's in emphasizing the processes by which "China" is constructed. The two works' self-reflexive strategy constantly refers to prevailing attitudes toward China, gathered from people "on the street" and from classic texts by Marco Polo, Roland Barthes, et al., and to the role the camera plays not only in framing what is before it, but in actually affecting the pro-filmic situation. For example, Fung describes the process of exclusion and inclusion that governs his imagemaking, while Hsia relates an anecdote about how her use of a camera always marks her as an outsider (both these stories are elaborated below). In contrast, even though Lowe is traveling with a tour of U.S. journalists, her film makes virtually no reference to a tradition of cinematic

representations of China nor to the effect her own camera has on the pro-filmic scene.

CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER is extremely unconventional in its own right. Its emphasis on a subjective, as opposed to impersonal, perspective marks it as an important precursor to the more stylized discursive approaches of contemporary documentaries. The eight years between CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER (1979) and THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE (1987) witnessed both the gradual acceptance of self-reflexiveness in theatrical documentaries (for example, SHERMAN'S MARCH, McElwee, 1986) and the increasing codification of a distinct video aesthetic for documentary. This shift might be marked by the differences between 1970s documentaries on PBS, and PBS's *P.O.V.* series of independent film and video in the 1990s.[14]

Furthermore, the conventional tone of Lowe's documentary is also a function of the expectation that she prove she could make a conventional documentary. As a woman of color working in television production in the 1970s, Felicia Lowe's work would have been scrutinized for signs of "affirmative action bias." Indeed, while critics have argued that women and people of color have pioneered new modes of documentary production (modes that reject documentary conventions designed to promote the illusion of objective truth), it could also be argued that such "marginalized" filmmakers have had to bend over backwards to make more conventional film products in the way that Lowe did.

However, self-reflexive movies are not necessarily less problematic or better able to interrogate received views of China. A movie that calls attention to the processes by which China is constructed may or may not be able to see China in a fresh light. Richard Fung grapples with this very aspect of self-reflexivity in his video about the land of his father.

THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE

If Richard Fung's video, THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE, foregrounds the camera and its role in shaping the pro-filmic, self-reflexivity here is not merely a function of shifting conventions or of authorial style. Rather, the formal differences between Lowe's and Fung's work underline a fundamental difference in the two filmmaker's experiences of China. Whereas Lowe seeks connection, Fung finds estrangement. And in Fung's work, this end becomes subordinated to the process, the means to the end. Indeed, the title cards emphasize process by presenting the title in two successive screens (separated by an intervening image), "The Way" and "To My Father's Village," thereby suggesting that the journey is as important as the destination. Fung's work does not describe China but rather the attempt to capture China on video.

When Fung arrives in his father's village, he is not reminded of a North American landscape. Instead his eyes and camera are immediately drawn to the tower of the house built by his family, instantly recognizable thanks to an oft-seen family photograph of the same house. The landscape is different — other houses were built since the photograph was taken — but the house remains visually unmistakable. Fung's awareness that the landscape has changed but is the same, that his video camera is recording what a still camera did years before, indicates that he cannot see China without seeing how China has been previously

represented. As he admits at the end of this sequence, he left the village without remembering to ask to see the house where his father was born. The house for which there is already a photograph becomes more important to Fung, or at least more immediate. Fung thus realizes he has been positioned as a tourist, taking photos of things that have already been photographed to prove that he has been there. More important, Fung realizes that as a video-maker and tourist he is not seeking out objects from his father's past but rather objects that he and his father have seen visual representations of and heard stories about.

Whereas CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER involves vaguely remembered stories from long ago, THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE includes more recent reminiscences about China. THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE is constructed around a series of narratives about Eugene Fung, Richard Fung's father. The video begins with an apparently staged bureaucratic interview. An off-screen woman's voice asks, "What is your name?" and a man's voice replies, "Eugene Fung," giving way to a sync-sound image of a woman's hands typing. Disjuncture between soundtrack and image, voice and the printed page, and (by implication) between modes of narration are subtly suggested by the distortions that creep into the "record." Richard Fung's voice (his body is in frame, but his head remains off screen) reports that his father's occupation is "businessman," but the hands type "proprietor." After some more "facts" are recorded, the segment returns to the image of a footpath. An intertitle reading "1279 AD" appears, a cultured, British-accented voice concisely sketches out a history of the Hakka people, and then it begins to narrate specifically the story of Eugene Fung's birth and migration to Trinidad (via Hong Kong and Canada) as a young man. This narration is accompanied by images which depart subtly from standard documentary practice. Hakka illustrations are given to us as freeze frames shot off a television monitor. Instead of a map of China, we see a close up on the cover of an atlas while a hand opens the book to the map of China. Instead of images of Canada, we see abstracted, obviously contemporary landscapes which connect with the narration allusively, even tangentially, e.g., a shot over the railing of a ferry illustrates the narrated journey by train across Canada to Halifax, and a view of a wing from the portal of a jumbo jet illustrates Eugene's migration to Toronto and his death following a stroke.

The segment concludes and is punctuated by an intertitle that reads "HISTORY and memory." If the section that just preceded the title consisted of facts which are a matter of public record ("HISTORY"), the section that follows consists of ephemera ("memory"): images from home movies are interspersed with textual reminiscences, as Fung's voice-over tells how little he knows about his father. This section, like the one that precedes it, begins with reference to public documentation as Fung goes through a box containing a marriage license, passports, and other documents; in this scene, the voice over comments that these documents don't tell much. But Fung's voice over is not positioned as the presenter of the "truth" of memory or Eugene's identity because the voice over doubts its own access to Eugene. As Eugene's youngest child, Fung tells us,

"I was always aware that I'd come in near the end of a story. Everyone in my family talked about the past...[for example, how] my father would whip out his belt at any sign of disobedience. They all said that I was lucky, but I felt excluded."

These opening sequences of *THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE* set up the framework of interlocking narratives and positions toward "documentation" that structure the video. The voice over sets out at least two stories: the seemingly objective facts and the subjective recollections, each with their own gaps. Each section begins with a "staged" moment of reflection (the recording of information on a bureaucratic form, and the attempt to read meaning from between the lines of those forms). Home movies and photos represent interventions into time, while official photographs document identity and attach facts, figures, and documentable events to the body. Finally, both introductory sections combine sound and image (voice over and visual footage) in a way that emphasizes their temporal disjuncture. In the "HISTORY" section, contemporary footage of a journey across Canada "illustrates" and alludes to the narrated journey. While in the "memory" section, the voice-over refers directly to the documents, home movies, and snapshots, positioning the voice post-image so that sound can interrogate the image. For example, the voice comments in reference to photos of the family at the beach,

"Besides, I never remember my father being that relaxed,"
acknowledging that snapshots are simultaneously "candid" and
"posed." [15]

As if to acknowledge the inadequacy of these accounts of his father's life, the "HISTORY and memory" segment is followed by "Tony and Dorothy," an interview with Eugene's nephew and niece. In this interview, Tony and Dorothy talk not about Eugene, nor about their father (Eugene's brother), but mostly about themselves, their village, and the house in the photograph. When Richard arrives at his father's village, his camera documents things from Dorothy's and Tony's stories. He gathers images of the bamboo poles on which laundry is hung and from which the Nationalist armies in the war years hung the heads of alleged Communists, a pair of chairs that are no longer in the house with the tower but now reside elsewhere, the house itself that Eugene never saw before except in a photograph. Fung's camera thus seeks to document the stories that he was told, to verify the existence of the family narratives' settings. This processes is emblemized in the image of the two chairs. The video image of the chairs has no meaning for Richard or for the viewer without his cousins' narrative. The narrative is the only thing that connects the chairs to Eugene.

Fung's piece makes us acutely aware of the distance that separates videomaker and father. On the one hand, that distance is linguistic. "He never taught us his language-there's a real finality in that," notes Fung; when in China, Fung has to ask his mother questions in English, who translates them into Cantonese for a woman who can interpret Hakka. On the other hand, Fung's distance from his father is also cultural. Because China is mediated by previous representations and narratives about China, even when in Shanghai, Fung's camera cannot capture what is in front of it. It seeks out, for example, the famous park with the "No Dogs or Chinese" sign immortalized in Bruce Lee's *THE CHINESE CONNECTION* (1972) and Han Suyin's *The Crippled Tree*. Here, Fung's voice-over announces,

"By the way, you can't see it, but to the left there is a park here in Shanghai...There was a sign here. It read, 'No Dogs or Chinese Allowed.'"

The videographer's compulsion to record that which has already been documented is so strong that here on the soundtrack, Fung attempts to compensate for an image which his camera had failed to record.

Fung's video seems, almost of its own accord, to reiterate rather than critique or amplify past representations. In photographing Shanghai, Fung admits in voice over that he intentionally excludes white tourists from the frame for "they spoil the purity of the image I'm trying to capture." Fung admits that his camera attempts to find a China that has not been penetrated by the West, a spatially and/or temporally removed China. In the editing, his voice over undercuts that attempted visual construction, allowing narrative space for those tourists in his video and therefore in China. The visual exclusion of tourists is marked as a deliberate act, yet the temporal disjunction between videography and voice over, production and postproduction, Fung as editor and Fung as camera operator, marks the videomaker in his Canadian studio as ashamed of his own actions in China. Thus in the finished tape, Fung foregrounds the act of constructing his video. He does this not just to call attention to the work's construction but to emphasize the shifts accompanying production, the project's historical evolution, and the videomaker's awareness of his complicity in representing China as exotic.[16]

In other words, while the video might be seen as an attempt to construct a Chinese filter through which to view Eugene Fung, the videomaker is aware that the task of constructing an accurate filter is beyond his capabilities, at least without resorting to simplifying China (i.e., excluding tourists from the image). That process of simplification insists upon a static vision of China as temporally and historically removed. But by titling his video "The Way" and not "My Father's Village," Fung emphasizes the journey through space and time which his video attempts to document, thus preserving temporal and spatial fluidity. Fung thus admits that the China to which he has access is spatially and temporally removed from the China he seeks, and in admitting that, he allows for the ongoing historical transformation of this "Chinese filter." The visual documents — both passports and snapshots — are problematic for Fung. As he notes, the photos

"were taken before I was born; if I had been there they might trigger a memory."

They record a moment in time (as does Fung), but, more specifically, they do not evoke his memories. To interpret the photos, he relies on narratives about the past assigned to them by family members who were aware of the events the photos depict. Fung's video attaches his own memories and thus a new narrative to those still images — the story of his journey to China.

But the video seems always aware that the narrative it constructs runs the risk of distorting the still image even more. For narrative cannot be restored to a still image once severed from it; instead, a new narrative must be constructed and attached to the image. For example, the bureaucratic interview that begins the film functions as an attempt to render Eugene Fung's life into comprehensible narrative, referring to documents like visas that locate Eugene in time and space. However, in offering a narrative, a passport photo further imposes bureaucratic order on the photograph. The passport photo is itself different from a snapshot in that it is posed and organized for legibility, and in addition the official stamp on

such a photograph marks the imposition of another subjectivity with its own narrative priorities. Furthermore, the inadequacy of official narratives about citizenship and identity is highlighted by the historical irony that many Chinese immigrants employed false papers to enter the United States. Fung thus attempts to attach a narrative to the passport photo that has meaning for him, emphasizing his subjectivity and thereby the image's "objective" function within the narrative.

MADE IN CHINA

MADE IN CHINA takes up in a different way the passage of time and its effect upon narrative. The film documents the experiences of Lisa Hsia, a second-generation Chinese American, who stays with her Chinese cousins when attending Beijing University. MADE IN CHINA begins with a moving-picture family portrait, snapshot-style, marking the occasion of Hsia's departure by train. After this introductory sequence, we see an animated sequence of a cartoon Lisa sitting and knitting. Here the voice over tells us she was a typical girl except for constantly being reminded of her "difference," something rendered in an audio collage of overlapping taunts and more-or-less good-natured inquiries about her ethnic heritage. This audio collage gives way to a montage of "on the street" interviews with white Americans who describe their impressions of the Chinese. At the beginning of the film, then, stereotypical misperceptions are located outside of Hsia in the surrounding white populace. By film's end, Hsia's voice over refers to her own preconceptions about China, followed by a recapitulation of the audio collage, suggesting alignment between her own attitudes before her visit with those testimonies. Hsia's film thus echoes Fung's video, which seems at first to interrogate the exotic portrait of China painted by Marco Polo, Matteo Ricci, Roland Barthes, and others but which later seems to admit that Fung too is complicitous in replicating these visions of China.

While both Fung's video and Hsia's film are interested in finding out what role China had in making them as historical individuals, the two works interrogate the role of picture taking and filmmaking in constructing these personal narratives in slightly different ways. For Fung, the home movies and photographs predate his birth and thus indicate a father who pre-existed his consciousness. The impetus behind Fung's video, then, is to attempt to determine which photographs reveal the truth of who his father was and how they do so. In MADE IN CHINA, however, the photographs which document Hsia's childhood stand in for the narrative of her life in the United States.[17] MADE IN CHINA presents its home movies and family snapshots as the baseline against which a childhood in China is imagined; Hsia's film asks the classic diasporic question: Who would I have been if we had not left?

When we are first formally introduced to Hsia's Chinese family, Hsia tells us that her auntie acted as if she had known her all her life. She

"treated me like the daughter she'd never had, which was wonderful, except that it meant she would consider me a child until I married. Whether I was three years old or twenty-two, it didn't matter. She considered me a kid, incapable of doing anything myself."

Hsia thus positions herself within the narrative of Chinese daughter while marking her inability to fit that role due to her American identity. When Hsia tells us how all-American her childhood was, we are shown photographs in a family album

which attest to her family's not-particularly-Chinese-ness (e.g., a young Hsia in a Girl Scouts uniform). The sequence is underscored by the Beatles' "When I'm Sixty-Four" (1967).

The film later returns to this topic of her all-American childhood with a montage of home movies showing such activities as clearing the yard, skipping rope, and riding a bike. This sequence is underscored by the Beach Boys' "When I Grow Up (To Be a Man)" (1964). The use of these two songs is instructive. The lyrics look to the future while the recordings themselves connote a specific period in America's past, the period of Hsia's youth.[18] In looking forward, both songs' lyrics articulate an interest in how life will turn out in the personal narratives that one envisions; at the same time, the recordings locate the snapshots and home movies in the filmmaker's childhood and vice versa.

The home movie sequence ends with a shot of a child — Lisa — on her bike followed by shots of the adult Lisa cycling with the Chinese masses. These shots lead directly into the animated sequence of her encounter with a Chinese policeman. In this sequence, Hsia's voice-over informs us that she sought to blend in with the Chinese, only to find that her ignorance of social customs caused her to run afoul of a traffic cop. She escapes by pulling out her camera and taking a photograph, which makes the policeman realize that she is not Chinese but rather an "honored foreign guest." In attempting to immerse herself in an alternative personal narrative in which she is an anonymous Chinese, Hsia finds it necessary to extricate herself by reverting to her role as tourist/ documentarian.[19]

This trope of parallel childhoods continues through another home movie montage sequence, this time of childhood vacations to Egypt, Greece, and Thailand. In the film's penultimate sequence, Auntie tells stories about her own youth and the Cultural Revolution. The sequence begins with Auntie showing traditional Chinese embroidery, which she had to put to practical use during the Cultural Revolution, highlighting the historically rupturing effect that China's political evolution had on its traditions. A brief insert of home movies illustrates Hsia's comment that she was eight when the Cultural Revolution began (the year she attended Disneyland) and eighteen when it ended. Auntie next pulls out her own photo albums, and the first image we are shown is of Auntie at twenty-two. Hsia's voice over informs us that that was the age when she herself arrived in China, explicitly connecting the tropes of cross-generational identification and parallel childhoods. The sequence ends with Auntie's pointing to mutilated photographs where friends and relatives with "political problems" were excised, followed by pages of empty photo mounts where photos of Lisa's U.S. family had been.

A photo album already marks the boundary between public and private memories. It is as private as the closet where it is kept, and as public as the coffee table where it is displayed. How then to interpret this blank page in the Chinese photo album? Here, it depicts the U.S. family's excision from the public face of their Chinese cousins, yet that absence is still marked by the photo mounts. These mounts, then, preserve the space for the reinsertion of the U.S. family, just as Fung preserves space for reinserting white tourists into his video record of Shanghai.

These blank pages near the end of the film recall the family photos at the beginning (which should be here, in the photo album, as well). The absence of the photos here might indicate that it is ultimately impossible to conceive parallel childhoods, the

"What if we hadn't left?" But the photo album pages, bookending the film as they do, remind us that the film itself arranges time into its own version of narrative: We have been led to believe in Lisa's gradual incorporation into her Chinese family over the course of the film. The film itself has straddled the Chinese and American narratives, doing the work of connecting and contrasting them. The film's narrative articulates the forces which impelled departure from China and compelled "return."

PHOTOGRAPHS AND STORIES

These movies interrogate China as a point of departure for a series of potential narratives. The act of traveling to China in *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER* and *THE WAY TO MY FATHER'S VILLAGE* involves an imaginative reversal of identifications with the forces which led fathers away from China. *MADE IN CHINA* speculates on the potential lives that Hsia might have led had she been born elsewhere. I have argued that these films are most successful when they emphasize and thematize the *processes* by which they constitute China, thereby illuminating the process of identity formation, of *becoming*.^[20] It is when these films refer to China as if it were a tangible, fixed object that their hypotheses are most precarious: attempting to secure China definitively risks reversing the process of constructing the film/videomaker's subjectivity. It is only in the process of departing from China that subjectivity emerges. Richard Fung understands himself best when he understands his father least, and Felicia Lowe recognizes that forging a connection with her family in China will strengthen her as she leaves China behind.

The investigation of the past continually throws the film/ videomaker upon the shoals of the present. The process of "returning" to China, identifying with an ancestor or the landscape and attaching new narratives to old images, emphasizes the discontinuity of cinematic investigation into the past. If Richard Fung traveled to China hoping to attach his father to a photograph of a house, he left China with that photograph irrevocably attached to himself, not to his father.

Images of the past fascinate not because they connect the past to us, but because they reveal the *arbitrary* relation of the past to ourselves. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes describes the process of seeking the one photograph that captures his mother's essence, settling on a photograph of her as a child taken at the Winter Garden long before he was born. This photograph, he says, captures his mother best, but it also captures the specter of her discontinuity.

"In 1865, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W.H. Steward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe." (96, emphasis in original)

The Winter Garden photograph is catastrophic since Barthes' mother is already dead, and by dying in this photograph, she dies before Barthes is born. A photograph of the past erases the present; the photograph is like a time traveler who returns to the past and murders her/his own ancestor. The narratives we attach to images connect them to us, but the images themselves possess the spectre of our own death. It is hardly surprising, then, that Richard Fung's process of becoming, "the way" he finds his connection to the past, is to tell stories, for narratives contest the discontinuous past represented by cinema. The narrated story asserts the connection of the still image to the present through its existence in continuously unfolding time. Our connection to the past is an illusion, however, as illusory as the process of ventriloquism through which soundtrack and image track assert their ontological connection.[21]

But the shadows in Plato's Cave do not produce sounds; it is the mind of the viewer/auditor that associates sound and image. Cinema expresses both the desire to connect to the past and the fundamental disconnection with the past, a desire for continuity built upon an underlying discontinuity. The process of constructing Asian American subjectivity is thus akin to the process of film/videomaking as foregrounded by Richard Fung's video. By narrating the process of videomaking, Fung emphasizes the choices he could have made, the moments in the past where divergence might have taken place, and the selection of images which, once shot, mark a catastrophic murder of the present.

These movies smooth over the discontinuous past and propose a means of connecting past to present while they mark that very discontinuity. Simultaneously pointing to the gap in the past and attempting to fill it, they stumble when they let themselves believe that their efforts are more than makeshift. Felicia Lowe's search for the "real" China succeeds too well since the only China she can see is the one she set out to find. Richard Fung searches for a pure China as well, but by narrating his failure to do so, he permits both China and his father to exist apart from his own image of the past. Lisa Hsia's figure of the censored photo album reveals the discontinuity of the photographs themselves (the catastrophe they reveal) as well as the revisionist political history that impelled their removal.

The absence of an image here marks both its discontinuous existence and the historical rupture represented by its censorship. The truth of the past would not be in recovering the missing photos, unless the photo album could somehow mark the history of their absence and return, for the restoration of the photo album would not accurately depict the photos' prodigal years, when retaining the past was relegated to memory. Similarly, Chinese American movies cannot simply narrativize images, masking their discontinuity, rather such films must instead mark the historical rupture occasioned by the image's narrative detachment. When Fung's photograph attaches to Richard, and not to Eugene, then Richard becomes the link that marks the discontinuous past, the past that separated the photograph from Eugene. Linking the past to the present, these film/videomakers become the splice that holds together the discontinuity of a jump cut.

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NOTES

1. In this essay, I follow *Tripmaster Monkey*'s lead and omit the hyphen from "Chinese American" and "Asian American." (For further discussion of the implications of this decision, see the sidebar to my article, "In Search of Asian American Cinema.") *The Woman Warrior* was published in 1975. Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* was published fourteen years later, in 1989. In the later book, Kingston's protagonist takes great pains to oppose the hyphenated "Chinese-American":

"When I hear you call yourselves 'Chinese,' I take you to mean American-understood, but too lazy to say it. You do mean 'Chinese' as short for 'Chinese-American,' don't you? We mustn't call ourselves 'Chinese' among those who are ready to send us back to where they think we came from. But 'Chinese-American' takes too long. Nobody says or hears past the first part. And 'Chinese-American' is inaccurate — as if we could have two countries. We need to take the hyphen out — 'Chinese American.' 'American,' the noun, and 'Chinese,' the adjective. From now on: 'Chinese Americans.' However. Not okay yet. 'Chinese hyphen American' sounds exactly the same as 'Chinese no hyphen American.' No revolution takes place in the mouth or in the ear" (327).

2. This article is part of a book-length manuscript on Asian American filmmakers which will be published by Duke University Press. Portions of this article were presented at the 1994 Ohio University Film Conference in Athens and the 1995 Society for Cinema Studies Conference in New York, where it received valuable critique from those in attendance. Finally, I am indebted to Julia Lesage and Gina Marchetti for shepherding this essay to publication.

3. The land of a parent's birth-riot of both parents' birth. In Richard Fung's case, his mother was three generations out of China while his father was born there. Felicia Lowe visits her father's family, and Lisa Hsia visits her mother's cousins.

4. In other words, the metaphoric filter that I am describing is not a membrane or a mesh but rather a photographer's filter, more akin to a polarized cap on the camera's lens. The goal of this filter is not to remove an element from solution but to mask aspects of the object being photographed for analysis. This filter does not directly affect the constitution of the object, but merely its appearance.

5. Literary examples of generational conflict among Chinese Americans include

C.Y. Lee's *The Flower Drum Song* (1957), Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). Cinematic examples include Ang Lee's *THE WEDDING BANQUET* (1993) and Chinese Canadian Mina Shum's *DOUBLE HAPPINESS* (1995), not to mention the film adaptations of the three novels cited above.

6. There have always been competing conceptions of Chinese American identity: Ling-chi Wang discusses the inadequacy of the two dominant paradigms, "assimilation (to the U.S.)" and "loyalty (to China)," in "The Structure of Dual Domination." The "loyalty" paradigm represents China's definition of diasporic Chinese as "overseas Chinese." (See Aihwa Ong's "Chinese Modernities" for a discussion of the discursive role "overseas Chinese" play in the economic development of the People's Republic of China.) Yet diasporic Chinese have often emphasized the fluidity of their national identities (see Ong's "On the Edge of Empires"). For a study of how Chinese Americans have defined their identity in transnational terms, see Arif Dirlik's "Asians on the Rim" and Joe Chung Fong's "Trans-nationalized Newspapers."

Discourses concerning "overseas Chinese" are most often deployed in the context of transnational capital. "Overseas Chinese" are economic resources, either as markets for Chinese goods or investors in China's economy. As such, the notion of "overseas Chinese" is applicable to certain diasporic narratives and not others; e.g., concern with China's human-rights record motivates the flexible citizenships that Ong describes ("On the Edge of Empires"). These "astronauts'" concern for political and economic freedom sets them apart from Chinese nationals who return to China with expertise gleaned from study at foreign universities. Transnational identities are therefore a subset of the subjectivities produced by the diasporic migration of Chinese. This essay contributes only indirectly to an understanding of transnational subjectivities. Rather, I emphasize how discourses about China have shaped Chinese American subjectivities.

7. Renee Tajima, in noting the historical significance of *CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER*, calls Lowe's film "an anecdote to the Sinophile frenzy that followed normalization" (23); perhaps Tajima meant "antidote" as well.

8. An additional consequence of the Communist Revolution is to underline that Chinese Americans who trace their ancestry back to pre-1949 China cannot go home again, for the People's Republic of China is a different nation (Thomas Wolfe's famous observation at a further remove).

9. Fung's Queer videos include *ORIENTATIONS* (1985), a documentary about Asian Canadian gays and lesbians, *FIGHTING CHANCE* (1990), about the impact of AIDS on that community, *CHINESE CHARACTERS* (1986), about Asian Canadians who watch gay male pornography, and *DIRTY LAUNDRY* (1996), an exploration of friendships and sexual attachments among the Chinese Canadian "bachelor community" that built the transcontinental railroad.

10. I speculate that there are purely practical reasons for these different cinematic registers and modes. Judging from the growth of the boys' and Hsia's facility with the Chinese language, it seems fairly clear that the 8mm footage dates from early in Hsia's stay. The 16mm footage includes a visit from Hsia's parents and the distribution of gifts from the States, and so I think it is likely that a film crew on

one or more occasions accompanied Hsia and/or her mother from the States to China, late in Hsia's visit. The 16mm footage also documents Hsia's departure from China, which might suggest that the gift-giving was part of a follow-up visit after Hsia's studies in Beijing had ended. Finally, the animated footage surely depicts events at which cameras were not present, events of a different pro-filmic order than footage of Hsia with her family, which, despite the vérité presentation, was "staged" or at least "planned."

11. Of course, animated footage is radically different from the indexicality of vérité and even direct address. The deliberate artifice of animation highlights the paradox of the insider/outsider axis. The animated footage shows us private spaces where cameras did not have access. Yet it stylizes those spaces in such a way that they cannot make claims to represent truth objectively.

12. These movies invite us to understand them as direct authorial expressions, and voice overs abet this process. However, I have endeavored to keep film/videomaker and movie distinct. Thus, when I refer to the film/videomaker (as in, "Fung tells us...") I am describing a voice over or other inscription of the film/videomaker's subjectivity. But when I refer to the movie itself (as in, "MADE IN CHINA narrates...") I am describing a textual operation in the movie, without attributing any authorial intentionality to the movie's rhetoric.

For more on the autobiographical mode and nonfiction cinema, see Jim Lane's "Notes on Theory and the Autobiographical Documentary Film in America." Albert Stone's *Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts* remains the touchstone for any investigation into U.S. autobiography, and Laura Marcus' *Auto/biographical Discourses* usefully discusses the use of autobiographical modes in discourses that are not strictly speaking autobiographical.

13. Note the sentimentality of this account, which de-emphasizes the role played by material factors such as economic discrimination and restricted opportunities for employment in determining settlement patterns.

14. The mid-1990s has witnessed the emergence of a pop-culture narrative about the evolution of documentary conventions. This can be seen in the plethora of articles in the mainstream press about the Oscars and the nomination process for documentaries. I'm thinking of numerous articles and editorials by popular film critics about the shut-out of critically acclaimed documentaries like *THE THIN BLUE LINE* (1988), *ROGER AND ME* (1989), and preeminently *HOOP DREAMS* (1994).

15. Roland Barthes claims that all photographs are "posed" in that the act of capturing a moment in time makes a "pose" of motion, whereas cinema does not record poses but time's passing. See *Camera Lucida*, section 33, pp. 78-80.

16. In the terms suggested by Lowe's analysis of space in "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity," the image track attempts to construct China as a discrete space, but the voice over re-inscribes white tourists and thus reminds of the permeability of the Chinese border.

17. This argument holds true for home movies, which function differently from family portraits. For example, an old family portrait of Hsia's father's family

functions in much the same way as the photo albums in Lowe's CHINA: LAND OF MY FATHER. The differing traditions of still photography (portraiture) and home movies account (in part) for this distinction in function.

18. Indeed, "When I'm Sixty-Four" harkens back to an early period of the English music hall and is therefore doubly nostalgic.

19. Students of documentary filmmaking immediately recognize that the footage of the adult Hsia on her bicycle is staged for the camera and later matched to the animation, further highlighting the temporal disjunction of the narrative.

20. See my essay, "Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: CHAN IS MISSING," for an extended discussion on the relation of process to hyphenate identities and on how film texts can destabilize states of "being" to promote the process of "becoming."

21. See Altman, "Moving Lips."

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

The last word The public sphere

by Chuck Kleinhans

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About a year ago, I heard on a radio news show that some survey had determined that most Americans get most of their information about current political events most of the time from the standup routines of late night TV talk shows. In other words, Jay Leno is more influential on "discourse in the public sphere" than George Will, Pat Robertson, Sam Donaldson, or Jim Lehrer. While the data was offered in the obvious ploy — to give intellectuals something to deplore about the media and the decline of the polity — I counter-intuited a different lesson, and began watching Leno's monologue, whenever I could catch it, with this in mind. My conclusion is simple: In the year of the Monica/Bill scandal, Leno gave you all you really needed to know in an efficient, quick, and humorous way.

In contrast, the proliferated cable news and commentary shows on CNBC, MSNBC, American Vision (extreme rightwing), etc. produced hour after hour of wailing, guessing, moaning, mock outrage, mock worrying, and spin drivel to no effect at all. When the story broke, one channel's daily "White House in Crisis" show ate up primetime with a seemingly endless house of mirrors effect.

Of course The Scandal fuels seemingly endless liberal-to-left handwringing about the decline of political discourse in the United States, the prevalence of attack ads, and negative ads and now 10-second slogan ads. But no one seems to ask the obvious question — what does more information really get you? In the U.S. two-party system, what more do you need to know than that Ken Starr is a priggish, anal retentive obsessive and Bill Clinton a womanizing pathological liar-by-stretching-definitions? Or what do I need to know, as an Illinois resident, of the position papers of Carol Mosely-Braun and Peter Fitzgerald? The party labels tell me enough, and the attack ads just flesh it out a tiny bit. Yes, I deplore the Senator's trip to Nigeria and praise for its dictator. But knowing she has no significant influence in Africa policy, what does it matter? I'm much more disturbed and angered by her being in the hip pocket of pharmaceutical giant Glaxo-Wellcome (a story detailed a while back in *The Nation*). But, faced with a Republican who consistently voted against gun control and to abolish the Department of Education, who else would I vote for?

Forgive me, earnest followers of political events, for being a leftist who hasn't looked at position papers since my 8th grade civics class had it as an assignment.

And forgive my cynicism, which emerged after voting for Lyndon Johnson in my first presidential election because "he won't get us into a war like Goldwater will."

But The Scandal does raise some interesting media matters. When we have a long drawn out media spectacle (as with OJ, to use another example), as opposed to a short or single dramatic one (Gulf War, death of Diana, the Home Run race), or a perennial one (abortion, war against drugs, affirmative action), we have a new form of public discourse, a different mediated public sphere, one which not only allows, but thrives on spreading discourse to a wider audience.

Today the professional worriers are alarmed that young school children know about oral sex. But isn't that a great improvement in social knowledge? Isn't it good for kids to realize that when they become sexually active, they can practice this (relatively) safe, assuredly non-procreative, sex? In other words, the Starr report was so instantly available on the Internet that most teens know how to use better than their parents. And the report was posted not on porn sites, but on the web pages of major newspapers and TV stations. It tells us the Good News that the President enjoys phone sex (another safe sex practice), and proliferates speculation that the Clintons have an Open Marriage, that Hillary is bisexual, etc., etc. Whatever immediate embarrassment all this may produce, it's clear that once again the media has pushed us across another threshold which in the long run almost inevitably leads to greater tolerance. The Scandal has reduced the age at which people become aware of diverse sexual practices and expanded the audience into the most conservative parts of the culture. The information is unavoidable, and the long-term effects of that information diffusion are interesting.

Perhaps the most telling long view lesson that emerges is just how little the Right understands its own use of the media. Back in the early months of the Clinton Presidency when Rush Limbaugh had a TV show, his smuttiness in pursuit of the Clintons knew no limits. Case in point, playing an excerpt from an Al Gore press conference, where the VP answers a reporter's question about the appropriateness of Hillary Clinton being an unelected, unappointed advisor on major policy. Gore's reply, "You have to realize that Hillary gives very good..." The VP's remarks freeze frame while a window insert shows Limbaugh chortling while the studio audience of Dittoheads draws the smutty conclusion, "...head," Then Gore finishes, "...advice." Republicans who had nothing to criticize with their guy dishing dirty jokes against the Clintons have no moral ground for outrage at Presidential sexual misbehavior. The craziness of the anti-Clinton cohort is extreme within their own coalition, as they manage to alienate moderates, and do less and less in terms of building and maintaining a grassroots base. Pat Robertson sells the Family Channel, certainly a plum of the Christian Right, to Murdoch, and a few weeks later the new Fox Family Channel begins reruns of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, vindicating the same Paul Reubens that Robertson wrinkled his nose at when the actor was arrested for masturbating in a porn theatre.

The center of gravity in discussing sex in the dear old "public sphere" has shifted decisively. And in the private sphere too, if we follow polling that indicates more people are talking about sexual practices and behaviors post-Monica. Now it's not only Jerry Springer who is bringing us the entertainment of the fallout from adulterous liaisons. While HBO and Showtime titillate us with simulated sex and frontal nudity, the Internet gives us Bert and Ernie visiting a strip club. But it's the

daily newspaper which reprints the Starr report, and the CBS affiliate which has it on their website. How then can intellectuals and Christian conservatives be outraged at Howard Stern, deplore *South Park*, and call *There's Something About Mary* toilet humor, without seeming to be totally out of touch with the everyday media world?

Of course the contradictory and recuperative powers of the media are immense. Jay Leno regularly features a segment called "Jay Walking," in which he interviews people in public places with simple quizzes on stuff like current events, geography, elementary school "facts." And as edited, the people always seem totally blitzed out and vacuous — good for a joke. But, how much do you really need to know, and what do you need to know? To participate in the Habermasian public sphere, does anyone really need the detail of the Starr report? Isn't it there just for cheap titillation, for schoolboy humor, for Dittohead self-confirmation? The general public was already filled in from Leno's daily jokes on the latest Starr press leak, and then going to summer's biggest box office comedy, people were laughing to see Cameron Diaz pluck "hair gel" from Ben Stiller's ear. The common sense and sense of humor of most people is the main story. The sphere of public discourse includes gross out jokes and acknowledgement of the commonness of oral sex. The self-righteous Right loses again on the cultural terrain.

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